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Growth of the Soil

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The Village of Segelfoss [*Segelfoss By*]

Alfred A. Knopf

Growth of the Soil

Translated from the Norwegian of

Knut Hamsun

by W. W. Worster

Volume One

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Book One

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Chapter I

THE long, long road over the moors and up into the forest — who trod it into being first of all? Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came. Afterward, some beast or other, following the faint tracks over marsh and moorland, wearing them deeper; after these again some Lapp gained scent of the path, and took that way from field to field, looking to his reindeer. Thus was made the road through the great Almenning — the common tracts without an owner; no-man's-land.

The man comes, walking toward the north. He bears a sack, the first sack, carrying food and some few implements. A strong, coarse fellow, with a red iron beard, and little scars on face and hands; sites of old wounds — were they gained in toil or fight? Maybe the man has been in prison, and is looking for a place to hide; or a philosopher, maybe, in search of peace. This or that, he comes; the figure of a man in this great solitude. He trudges on; bird and beast are silent all about him; now and again he utters a word or two; speaking to himself. "Eyah — well, well . . ."— so he speaks to himself. Here and there, where the moors give place

to a kindlier spot, an open space in the midst of the forest, he lays down the sack and goes exploring; after a while he returns, heaves the sack to his shoulder again, and trudges on. So through the day, noting time by the sun; night falls, and he throws himself down on the heather, resting on one arm.

A few hours' rest, and he is on the move again: "Eyah, well . . ."— moving northward again, noting time by the sun; a meal of barley cakes and goats' milk cheese, a drink of water from the stream, and on again. This day too he journeys, for there are many kindly spots in the woods to be explored. What is he seeking? A place, a patch of ground? An emigrant, maybe, from the homestead tracts; he keeps his eyes alert, looking out; now and again he climbs to the top of a hill, looking out. The sun goes down once more.

He moves along the western side of a valley; wooded ground, with leafy trees among the spruce and pine, and grass beneath. Hours of this, and twilight is falling, but his ear catches the faint purl of running water, and it heartens him like the voice of a living thing. He climbs the slope, and sees the valley half in darkness below; beyond, the sky to the south. He lies down to rest.

The morning shows him a range of pasture and woodland. He moves down, and there is a green hillside; far below, a glimpse of the stream, and a hare bounding across. The man nods his head, as it were approvingly — the stream is not so broad but that a hare may cross it at a bound. A white grouse

sitting close upon its nest starts up at his feet with an angry hiss, and he nods again: feathered game and fur — a good spot this. Heather, bilberry, and cloudberry cover the ground; there are tiny ferns, and the seven-pointed star flowers of the wintergreen. Here and there he stops to dig with an iron tool, and finds good mould, or peaty soil, manured with the rotted wood and fallen leaves of a thousand years. He nods, to say that he has found himself a place to stay and live: ay, he will stay here and live. Two days he goes exploring the country round, returning each evening to the hillside. He sleeps at night on a bed of stacked pine; already he feels at home here, with a bed of pine beneath an overhanging rock.

The worst of his task had been to find the place; this no-man's place, but his. Now, there was work to fill his days. He started at once, stripping birch bark in the woods farther off, while the sap was still in the trees. The bark he pressed and dried, and when he had gathered a heavy load, carried it all the miles back to the village, to be sold for building. Then back to the hillside, with new sacks of food and implements; flour and pork, a cooking-pot, a spade — out and back along the way he had come, carrying loads all the time. A born carrier of loads, a lumbering barge of a man in the forest — oh, as if he loved his calling, tramping long roads and carrying heavy burdens; as if life without a load upon one's shoulders were a miserable thing, no life for him.

One day he came up with more than the load he bore; came leading three goats in a leash. He was proud of his goats as if they had been horned cattle, and tended them kindly. Then came the first stranger passing, a nomad Lapp; at sight of the goats, he knew that this was a man who had come to stay, and spoke to him.

"You going to live here for good?"

"Ay," said the man.

"What's your name?"

"Isak. You don't know of a woman body anywhere'd come and help?"

"No. But I'll say a word of it to all I meet."

"Ay, do that. Say I've creatures here, and none to look to them."

The Lapp went on his way. Isak — ay, he would say a word of that. The man on the hillside was no runaway; he had told his name. A runaway? He would have been found. Only a worker, and a hardy one. He set about cutting winter fodder for his goats, clearing the ground, digging a field, shifting stones, making a wall of stones. By the autumn he had built a house for himself, a hut of turf, sound and strong and warm; storms could not shake it, and nothing could burn it down. Here was a home; he could go inside and shut the door, and stay there; could stand outside on the door-slab, the owner of that house, if any should pass by. There were two rooms in the hut; for himself at the one end, and for his beasts at the other. Farthest in, against the wall of rock, was the hayloft. Everything was there.

Two more Lapps come by, father and son. They stand resting with both hands on their long staves, taking stock of the hut and the clearing, noting the sound of the goat-bells up on the hillside.

"*Goddag,*" say the Lapps. "And here's fine folk come to live." Lapps talk that way, with flattering words.

"You don't know of any woman hereabouts to help?" says Isak, thinking always of but one thing.

"Woman to help? No. But we'll say a word of it."

"Ay, if you'd be so good. That I've a house and a bit of ground here, and goats, but no woman to help. Say that."

Oh, he had sought about for a woman to help each time he had been down to the village with his loads of bark, but there was none to be found. They would look at him, a widow or an old unmarried one or so, but all afraid to offer, whatever might be in their minds. Isak couldn't tell why. Couldn't tell why? Who would go as help to live with a man in the wilds, ever so many miles away — a whole day's journey to the nearest neighbour? And the man himself was no way charming or pleasant by his looks, far from it; and when he spoke it was no tenor with eyes to heaven, but a coarse voice, something like a beast's.

Well, he would have to manage alone.

In winter, he made great wooden troughs, and sold them in the village, carrying sacks of food and tools back through the snow; hard days when he was

tied to a load. There were the goats, and none to look to them; he could not be away for long. And what did he do? Need made him wise; his brain was strong and little used; he trained it up to ever more and more. His first way was to let the goats loose before starting off himself, so that they could get a full feed among the undergrowth in the woods. But he found another plan. He took a bucket, a great vessel, and hung it up by the river so that a single drop fell in at a time, taking fourteen hours to fill it. When it was full to the brim, the weight was right; the bucket sank, and in doing so, pulled a line connected with the hayloft; a trap-door opened, and three bundles of fodder came through — the goats were fed.

That was his way.

A bright idea; an inspiration, maybe, sent from God. The man had none to help him but himself. It served his need until late in the autumn; then came the first snow, then rain, then snow again, snowing all the time. And his machine went wrong; the bucket was filled from above, opening the trap too soon. He fixed a cover over, and all went well again for a time; then came winter, the drop of water froze to an icicle, and stopped the machine for good.

The goats must do as their master — learn to do without.

Hard times — the man had need of help, and there was none, yet still he found a way. He worked and worked at his home; he made a window

in the hut with two panes of real glass, and that was a bright and wonderful day in his life. No need of lighting fires to see; he could sit indoors and work at his wooden troughs by daylight. Better days, brighter days . . . eyah!

He read no books, but his thoughts were often with God; it was natural, coming of simplicity and awe. The stars in the sky, the wind in the trees, the solitude and the wide-spreading snow, the might of earth and over earth filled him many times a day with a deep earnestness. He was a sinner and feared God; on Sundays he washed himself out of reverence for the holy day, but worked none the less as through the week.

Spring came; he worked on his patch of ground, and planted potatoes. His live stock multiplied; the two she-goats had each had twins, making seven in all about the place. He made a bigger shed for them, ready for further increase, and put a couple of glass panes in there too. Ay, 'twas lighter and brighter now in every way.

And then at last came help; the woman he needed. She tacked about for a long time, this way and that across the hillside, before venturing near; it was evening before she could bring herself to come down. And then she came — a big, brown-eyed girl, full-built and coarse, with good, heavy hands, and rough hide brogues on her feet as if she had been a Lapp, and a calfskin bag slung from her shoulders. Not altogether young; speaking politely; somewhere nearing thirty.

There was nothing to fear; but she gave him greeting and said hastily: "I was going cross the hills, and took this way, that was all."

"Ho," said the man. He could barely take her meaning, for she spoke in a slovenly way; also, she kept her face turned aside.

"Ay," said she, "'tis a long way to come."

"Ay, it's that," says the man. "Cross the hills, you said?"

"Yes."

"And what for?"

"I've my people there."

"Eh, so you've your people there? And what's your name?"

"Inger. And what's yours?"

"Isak."

"Isak? H'm. D'you live here yourself, maybe?"

"Ay, here, such as it is."

"Why, 'tis none so bad," said she to please him.

Now he had grown something clever to think out the way of things, and it struck him then she'd come for that very business and no other; had started out two days back just to come here. Maybe she had heard of his wanting a woman to help.

"Go inside a bit and rest your feet," said he.

They went into the hut and took a bit of the food she had brought, and some of his goats' milk to drink; then they made coffee, that she had brought with her in a bladder. Settled down comfortably over their coffee until bedtime. And in the night, he lay wanting her, and she was willing.

She did not go away next morning; all that day she did not go, but helped about the place; milked the goats, and scoured pots and things with fine sand, and got them clean. She did not go away at all. Inger was her name. And Isak was his name.

And now it was another life for the solitary man. True, this wife of his had a curious slovenly way of speech, and always turning her face aside, by reason of a hare-lip that she had, but that was no matter. Save that her mouth was disfigured, she would hardly have come to him at all; he might well be grateful for that she was marked with a hare-lip. And as to that, he himself was no beauty. Isak with the iron beard and rugged body, a grim and surly figure of a man; ay, as a man seen through a flaw in the window-pane. His look was not a gentle one; as if Barabbas might break loose at any minute. It was a wonder Inger herself did not run away.

She did not run away. When he had been out, and came home again, there was Inger at the hut; the two were one, the woman and the hut.

It was another mouth for him to feed, but no loss in that; he had more freedom now, and could go and stay as he needed. And there were matters to be looked to away from home. There was the river; pleasant to look at, and deep and swift besides; a river not to be despised; it must come from some big water up in the hills. He got himself some fishing gear and went exploring; in the evening he came back with a basket of trout and char. This was a great

thing to Inger, and a marvel; she was overwhelmed, being no way used to fine dishes. She clapped her hands and cried out: "Why! wherever . . ." And she was not slow to see how he was pleased at her surprise, and proud of it, for she said more in the same strain — oh, she had never seen the like, and how had he ever managed to find such things!

Inger was a blessing, too, in other ways. No clever head nor great in wit, maybe — but she had two lambing ewes with some of her kinsfolk, and brought them down. It was the best they could have wished for at the hut; sheep with wool and lambs, four new head to their stock about the place; it was growing, getting bigger; a wonder and a marvel how their stock was grown. And Inger brought more; clothes, and little trifles of her own, a looking-glass, and a string of pretty glass beads, a spinning-wheel, and carding-combs. Why, if she went on that gait, the hut would soon be filled from floor to roof, and no room for more! Isak was astonished in his turn at all this wealth of goods, but being a silent man, and slow to speak, he said nothing, only shambled out to the door-slab and looked at the weather, and shambled in again. Ay, he had been lucky indeed; he felt himself more and more in love, or drawn towards her, or whatever it might be.

"You've no call to fetch along all such stuff," said he. "'Tis more than's needed."

"I've more if I like to fetch it. And there's Uncle Sivert besides — you've heard of him?"

"No."

"Why, he's a rich man, and district treasurer besides."

Love makes a fool of the wise. Isak felt he must do something grand himself, and overdid it. "What I was going to say; you've no need to bother with hoeing potatoes. I'll do it myself the evening, when I come home."

And he took his ax and went off to the woods.

She heard him felling in the woods, not so far off; she could hear from the crash that he was felling big timber. She listened for a while, and then went out to the potato field and set to work hoeing. Love makes fools wise.

Isak came home in the evening, hauling a huge trunk by a rope. Oh, that simple and innocent Isak, he made all the noise he could with his tree-trunk, and coughed and hemmed, all for her to come out and wonder at him. And sure enough:

"Why, you're out of your senses," said Inger when she came out. "Is that work for a man single-handed?" He made no answer; wouldn't have said a word for anything. To do a little more than was work for a man single-handed was nothing to speak of — nothing at all. A stick of timber — huh! "And what are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"Oh, we'll see," he answered carelessly, as if scarcely heeding she was there.

But when he saw that she had hoed the potatoes after all he was not pleased. It was as if she had done almost as much as he; and that was not to his

liking. He slipped the rope from the tree-trunk and went off with it once more.

"What, haven't you done yet?"

"No," said he gruffly.

And he came back with another stick like the last, only with no noise nor sign of being out of breath; hauled it up to the hut like an ox, and left it there.

That summer he felled a mass of timber, and brought it to the hut.

Chapter II

INGER packed up some food one day in her calf-skin bag. "I'd thought of going across to see my people, just how they're faring."

"Ay," said Isak.

"I must have a bit of talk with them about things."

Isak did not go out at once to see her off, but waited quite a while. And when at last he shambled out, looking never the least bit anxious, never the least bit miserable and full of fear, Inger was all but vanished already through the fringe of the forest.

"Hem!" He cleared his throat, and called, "Will you be coming back maybe?" He had not meant to ask her that, but . . .

"Coming back? Why, what's in your mind? Of course I'll be coming back."

"H'm."

So he was left alone again — eyah, well . . . ! With his strength, and the love of work that was in him, he could not idle in and out about the hut doing nothing; he set to, clearing timber, felling straight, good sticks, and cutting them flat on two sides. He worked at this all through the day, then he milked the goats and went to bed.

Sadly bare and empty now in the hut; a heavy silence clung about the peat walls and the earthen

floor; a deep and solemn loneliness. Spinning-wheel and carding-combs were in their place; the beads, too, were safe as they had been, stowed away in a bag under the roof. Inger had taken nothing of her belongings. But Isak, unthinkably simple as he was, grew afraid of the dark in the light summer nights, and saw Shapes and Things stealing past the window. He got up before dawn, about two o'clock by the light, and ate his breakfast, a mighty dish of porridge to last the day, and save the waste of time in cooking more. In the evening he turned up new ground, to make a bigger field for the potatoes.

Three days he worked with spade and ax by turns; Inger should be coming on the next. 'Twould be but reasonable to have a platter of fish for her when she came — but the straight road to the water lay by the way she would come, and it might seem . . . So he went a longer way; a new way, over the hills where he had never been before. Grey rock and brown, and strewed about with bits of heavy stone, heavy as copper or lead. There might be many things in those heavy stones; gold or silver, like as not — he had no knowledge of such things, and did not care. He came to the water; the fly was up, and the fish were biting well that night. He brought home a basket of fish that Inger would open her eyes to see! Going back in the morning by the way he had come, he picked up a couple of the heavy little stones among the hills; they were brown, with specks of dark blue here and there, and wondrous heavy in the hand.

Inger had not come, and did not come. This was the fourth day. He milked the goats as he had used to do when he lived alone with them and had no other to help; then he went up to a quarry near by and carried down stones; great piles of carefully chosen blocks and flakes, to build a wall. He was busy with no end of things.

On the fifth evening, he turned in to rest with a little fear at his heart — but there were the carding-combs and spinning-wheel, and the string of beads. Sadly empty and bare in the hut, and never a sound; the hours were long, and when at last he did hear something like a sound of footsteps outside, he told himself that it was fancy, nothing more. "Eyah, *Herregud!*"[1] he murmured, desolate in spirit. And Isak was not one to use words lightly. There was the tramping of feet again outside, and a moment after something gliding past the window; something with horns, something alive. He sprang up, over to the door, and lo, a vision! "God or the devil," muttered Isak, who did not use words lightly. He saw a cow; Inger and a cow, vanishing into the shed.

If he had not stood there himself and heard it — Inger talking softly to the cow in the shed — he would not have believed. But there he stood. And all at once a black misgiving came into his mind: a clever wife, ay, a manager of wonders — but, after all . . . No, it was too much, and that was the only

[1] Literally, "Lord God." The word is frequently used, as here, in a sense of resignation, as it were a sigh.

word for it. A spinning-wheel and carding-combs at a pinch; even the beads perhaps, though they were over fine to be come by in any way proper and natural. But a cow, picked up straying on the road, maybe, or in a field — it would be missed in no time, and have to be found.

Inger stepped out of the shed, and said with a proud little laugh:

"It's only me. I've brought my cow along."

"H'm," said Isak.

"It was that made me so long — I couldn't go but softly with her over the hills."

"And so you've brought a cow?" said he.

"Yes," said she, all ready to burst with greatness and riches on earth. "Don't you believe me, perhaps?"

Isak feared the worst, but made no sign, and only said:

"Come inside and get something to eat."

"Did you see her? Isn't she a pretty cow?"

"Ay, a fine cow," said Isak. And speaking as carelessly as he could, he asked, "Where d'you get her?"

"Her name's Goldenhorns. What's that wall to be for you've been building up here? You'll work yourself to death, you will. Oh, come and look at the cow, now, won't you?"

They went out to look, and Isak was in his underclothes, but that was no matter. They looked and looked the cow all over carefully, in every part, and

noted all the markings, head and shoulders, buttocks and thighs, where it was red and white, and how it stood.

"How old d'you think she might be?" asked Isak cautiously.

"Think? Why, she's just exactly a tiny way on in her fourth year. I brought her up myself, and they all said it was the sweetest calf they'd ever seen. But will there be feed enough here, d'you think?"

Isak began to believe, as he was only too willing to do, that all was well. "As for the feed, why, there'll be feed enough, never fear."

Then they went indoors to eat and drink and make an evening together. They lay awake talking of Cow; of the great event. "And isn't she a dear cow, too? Her second's on the way. And her name's Goldenhorns. Are you asleep, Isak?"

"No."

"And what do you think, she knew me again; knew me at once, and followed me like a lamb. We lay up in the hills a bit last night."

"Ho?"

"But she'll have to be tied up through the summer, all the same, or she'll be running off. A cow's a cow."

"Where's she been before?" asked Isak at last.

"Why, with my people, where she belonged. And they were quite sorry to lose her, I can tell you; and the little ones cried when I took her away."

Could she be making it all up, and coming out with

it so pat? No, it wasn't thinkable. It must be true, the cow was hers. Ho, they were getting well-to-do, with this hut of theirs, this farm of theirs; why, 'twas good enough for any one. Ay, they'd as good as all they could wish for already. Oh, that Inger; he loved her and she loved him again; they were frugal folk; they lived in primitive wise, and lacked for nothing. "Let's go to sleep!" And they went to sleep. And wakened in the morning to another day, with things to look at, matters to see to, once again; ay, toil and pleasure, ups and downs, the way of life.

As, for instance, with those timber baulks — should he try to fit them up together? Isak had kept his eyes about him down in the village, with that very thing in mind, and seen how it was done; he could build with timber himself, why not? Moreover, it was a call upon him; it must be done. Hadn't they a farm with sheep, a farm with a cow already, goats that were many already and would be more? — their live stock alone was crowding them out of the turf hut; something must be done. And best get on with it at once, while the potatoes were still in flower, and before the haytime began. Inger would have to lend a hand here and there.

Isak wakes in the night and gets up, Inger sleeping fine and sound after her long tramp, and out he goes to the cowshed. Now it must not be thought that he talked to Cow in any obsequious and disgustful flattery; no, he patted her decently, and looked her over once more in every part, to see if there

should, by chance, be any sign, any mark of her belonging to strange owners. No mark, no sign, and Isak steals away relieved.

There lies the timber. He falls to, rolling the baulks, then lifting them, setting them up against the wall in a framework; one big frame for a parlour, and a smaller one — there must be a room to sleep in. It was heavy work, hard-breathing work, and his mind being set on it, he forgot the time. There comes a smoke from the roof-hole of the hut, and Inger steps out and calls to breakfast.

"And what are you busy with now?" asked Inger.

"You're early about," says Isak, and that was all.

Ho, that Isak with his secrets and his lordly ways! But it pleased him, maybe, to have her asking and wondering, and curious about his doings. He ate a bit, and sat for a while in the hut before going out again. What could he be waiting for?

"H'm," says he at last, getting up. "This won't do. Can't sit here idling today. Work to be done."

"Seems like you're building," says Inger. "What?"

And he answered condescendingly, this great man who went about building with timber all by himself, he answered: "Why, you can see as much, I take it."

"Yes. . . . Yes, of course."

"Building — why, there's no help for it as I can see. Here's you come bringing a whole cow to the farm — that means a cowshed, I suppose?"

Poor Inger, not so eternally wise as he, as Isak, that lord of creation. And this was before she learned to know him, and reckon with his way of putting things. Says Inger:

"Why, it's never a cowshed you're building, surely?"

"Ho," says he.

"But you don't mean it? I — I thought you'd be building a house first."

"Think so?" says Isak, putting up a face as if he'd never in life have thought of that himself.

"Why, yes. And put the beasts in the hut."

Isak thought for a bit. "Ay, maybe 'twould be best so."

"There," says Inger, all glad and triumphant. "You see I'm some good after all."

"Ay, that's true. And what'd you say to a house with two rooms in?"

"*Two* rooms? Oh . . . ! Why, 'twould be just like other folks. Do you think we could?"

They did. Isak he went about building, notching his baulks and fitting up his framework; also he managed a hearth and fireplace of picked stones, though this last was troublesome, and Isak himself was not always pleased with his work. Haytime came, and he was forced to climb down from his building and go about the hillsides far and near, cutting grass and bearing home the hay in mighty loads. Then one rainy day he must go down to the village.

"What you want in the village?"

"Well, I can't say exactly as yet. . . ."

He set off, and stayed away two days, and came back with a cooking-stove — a barge of a man surging up through the forest with a whole iron stove on his back. "'Tis more than a man can do," said Inger. "You'll kill yourself that gait." But Isak pulled down the stone hearth, that didn't look so well in the new house, and set up the cooking-stove in its place. "'Tisn't every one has a cooking-stove," said Inger. "Of all the wonders, how we're getting on! . . ."

Haymaking still; Isak bringing in loads and masses of hay, for woodland grass is not the same as meadow grass, more's the pity, but poorer by far. It was only on rainy days now that he could spare time for his building; 'twas a lengthy business, and even by August, when all the hay was in, safely stored under the shelter of the rock, the new house was still but half-way done. Then by September: "This won't do," said Isak. "You'd better run down to the village and get a man to help." Inger had been something poorly of late, and didn't run much now, but all the same she got herself ready to go.

But Isak had changed his mind again; had put on his lordly manner again, and said he would manage by himself. "No call to bother with other folk," says he; "I can manage it alone."

"'Tis more than one man's work," says Inger. "You'll wear yourself out."

"Just help me to hoist these up," says Isak, and that was all.

October came, and Inger had to give up. This

was a hard blow, for the roof-beams must be got up at any cost, and the place covered in before the autumn rains; there was not a day to be lost. What could be wrong with Inger? Not going to be ill? She would make cheese now and then from the goats' milk, but beyond that she did little save shifting Goldenhorns a dozen times a day where she grazed.

" Bring up a good-sized basket, or a box," she had said, " next time you're down to the village."

" What d'you want that for? " asked Isak.

" I'll just be wanting it," said Inger.

Isak hauled up the roof-beams on a rope, Inger guiding them with one hand; it seemed a help just to have her about. Bit by bit the work went on; there was no great height to the roof, but the timber was huge and heavy for a little house.

The weather kept fine, more or less. Inger got the potatoes in by herself, and Isak had the roofing done before the rain came on in earnest. The goats were brought in of a night into the hut and all slept there together; they managed somehow, they managed everyway, and did not grumble.

Isak was getting ready for another journey down to the village. Said Inger very humbly:

" Do you think perhaps you could bring up a good-sized basket, or a box? "

" I've ordered some glass windows," said Isak. " And a couple of painted doors. I'll have to fetch them up," said he in his lordly way.

"Ay well, then. It's no great matter about the basket."

"What did you want with a basket? What's it for?"

"What's it for? . . . Oh, haven't you eyes in your head!"

Isak went off deep in thought. Two days later he came back, with a window and a door for the parlour, and a door for the bedroom; also he had hung round his neck in front a good-sized packing-case, and full of provisions to boot.

"You'll carry yourself to death one day," said Inger.

"Ho, indeed!" Isak was very far indeed from being dead; he took out a bottle of medicine from his pocket — naphtha it was — and gave it to Inger with orders to take it regularly and get well again. And there were the windows and the painted doors that he could fairly boast of; he set to work at once fitting them in. Oh, such little doors, and second-hand at that, but painted up all neat and fine again in red and white; 'twas almost as good as having pictures on the walls.

And now they moved into the new building, and the animals had the turf hut to themselves, only a lambing ewe was left with Cow, lest she should feel lonely.

They had done well, these builders in the waste; ay, 'twas a wonder and a marvel to themselves.

Chapter III

ISAK worked on the land until the frost set in; there were stones and roots to be dug up and cleared away, and the meadow to be levelled ready for next year. When the ground hardened, he left his field work and became a woodman, felling and cutting up great quantities of logs.

"What do you want with all these logs?" Inger would say.

"Oh, they'll be useful some way," said Isak offhandedly, as though he had no plan. But Isak had a plan, never fear. Here was virgin forest, a dense growth, right close up to the house, a barrier hedging in his fields where he wanted room. Moreover, there must be some way of getting the logs down to the village that winter; there were folk enough would be glad of wood for firing. It was sound enough, and Isak was in no doubt; he stuck to his work in the forest, felling trees and cutting them up into logs.

Inger came out often, to watch him at work. He took no notice, but made as if her coming were no matter, and not at all a thing he wished for her to do; but she understood all the same that it pleased him to have her there. They had a strange way, too, of speaking to each other at times.

"Couldn't you find things to do but come out here and get stark frozen?" says Isak.

"I'm well enough for me," says Inger. "But I can't see there's any living sense in you working yourself to death like you do."

"Ho! You just pick up that coat of mine there and put it on you."

"Put on your coat? Likely, indeed. I've no time to sit here now, with Goldenhorns ready to calve and all."

"H'm. Calving, you say?"

"As if you didn't know! But what do you think now about that same calf. Let it stay and be weaned, maybe?"

"Do as you think; 'tis none of my business with calves and things."

"Well, 'twould be a pity to eat up calf, seems to me. And leave us with but one cow on the place."

"Don't seem to me like you'd do that anyway," says Isak.

That was their way. Lonely folk, ugly to look at and overfull of growth, but a blessing for each other, for the beasts, and for the earth.

And Goldenhorns calved. A great day in the wilderness, a joy and a delight. They gave her flour-wash, and Isak himself saw to it there was no stint of flour, though he had carried it all the way himself, on his back. And there lay a pretty calf, a beauty, red-flanked like her mother, and comically bewildered at the miracle of coming into the world.

In a couple of years she would be having calves of her own.

" 'Twill be a grand fine cow when she grows up," said Inger. " And what are we to call her, now? I can't think."

Inger was childish in her ways, and no clever wit for anything.

" Call her? " said Isak. " Why, Silverhorns, of course; what else? "

The first snow came. As soon as there was a passable road, Isak set out for the village, full of concealment and mystery as ever, when Inger asked his errand. And sure enough, he came back this time with a new and unthinkable surprise. A horse and sledge, nothing less.

" Here's foolishness," says Inger. " And you've not stolen it, I suppose? "

" Stolen it? "

" Well, found it, then? "

Now if only he could have said: " 'Tis my horse — our horse. . . ." But to tell the truth, he had only hired it, after all. Hired horse and sledge to cart his logs.

Isak drove down with his loads of firewood, and brought back food, herrings and flour. And one day he came up with a young bull on the sledge; bought it for next to nothing, by reason they were getting short of fodder down in the village. Shaggy and thin, no ways a beauty, but decently built for all that, and wanted no more than proper feed to set it right. And with a cow they had already . . .

"What'll you be bringing up next?" said Inger.

Isak brought up a host of things. Brought up planks and a saw he had got in exchange for timber; a grindstone, a wafer iron, tools — all in exchange for his logs. Inger was bursting with riches, and said each time: "What, more things! When we've cattle and all a body could think of!"

They had enough to meet their needs for no little time to come, and were well-to-do folk. What was Isak to start on again next spring? He had thought it all out, tramping down beside his loads of wood that winter; he would clear more ground over the hillside and level it off, cut up more logs to dry through the summer, and take down double loads when the snow came fit for sledging. It worked out beautifully.

But there was another matter Isak had thought of times out of number: that Goldenhorns, where had she come from, whose had she been? There was never a wife on earth like Inger. Ho! a wild thing she was, that let him do as he pleased with her, and was glad of it. But — suppose one day they were to come for the cow, and take it away — and worse, maybe, to come after? What was it Inger herself had said about the horse: "You haven't stolen it, I suppose, or found it?" That was her first thought, yes. That was what she had said; who could say if she were to be trusted — what should he do? He had thought of it all many a time. And here he had brought up a mate himself for the cow — for a stolen cow, maybe!

And there was the horse he would have to return again. A pity — for 'twas a little friendly beast, and grown fond of them already.

"Never mind," said Inger comfortingly. "Why, you've done wonders already."

"Ay, but just now with the spring coming on — and I've need of a horse. . . ."

Next morning he drove off quietly with the last load, and was away two days. Coming back on foot the third day, he stopped as he neared the house, and stood listening. There was a curious noise inside. . . . A child crying — Eyah, *Herregud!* . . . Well, there it was; but a terrible strange thing. And Inger had never said a word.

He stepped inside, and there first thing of all was the packing-case — the famous packing-case that he had carried home slung round his neck in front; there it was, hung up by a string at each end from the ceiling, a cradle and a bedplace for the child. Inger was up, pottering about half-dressed — she had milked the cow and the goats, as it might have been just an ordinary day.

The child stopped crying. "You're through with it already?" said Isak.

"Ay, I'm through with it now."

"H'm."

"It came the first evening you were gone."

"H'm."

"I'd only to get my things off and hang up the cradle there, but it was too much for me, like, and I had to lie down."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Why, I couldn't say to a minute when it'd be. 'Tis a boy."

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"Ho, a boy."

"And I can't for the life of me think what we're to call him," said Inger.

Isak peeped at the little red face; well shaped it was, and no hare-lip, and a growth of hair all thick on the head. A fine little fellow for his rank and station in a packing-case; Isak felt himself curiously weak. The rugged man stood there with a miracle before him; a thing created first of all in a sacred mist, showing forth now in life with a little face like an allegory. Days and years, and the miracle would be a human being.

"Come and have your food," said Inger. . . .

Isak is a woodman, felling trees and sawing logs. He is better off now than before, having a saw. He works away, and mighty piles of wood grow up; he makes a street of them, a town, built up of stacks and piles of wood. Inger is more about the house now, and does not come out as before to watch him at his work; Isak must find a pretext now and then to slip off home for a moment instead. Queer to have a little fellow like that about the place! Isak, of course, would never dream of taking any notice — 'twas but a bit of a thing in a packing-case. And as for being fond of it . . . But when it cried, well, it was only human nature to feel just a little something for a cry like that; a little tiny cry like that.

"Don't touch him!" says Inger. "With your hands all messed up with resin and all!"

"Resin, indeed!" says Isak. "Why, I haven't had resin on my hands since I built this house. Give me the boy, let me take him — there, he's as right as can be!"

Early in May came a visitor. A woman came over the hills to that lonely place where none ever came; she was of Inger's kinsfolk, though not near, and they made her welcome.

"I thought I'd just look in," she says, "and see how Goldenhorns gets on since she left us."

Inger looks at the child, and talks to it in a little pitying voice: "Ah, there's none asks how he's getting on, that's but a little tiny thing."

"Why, as for that, any one can see how he's getting on. A fine little lad and all. And who'd have thought it a year gone, Inger, to find you here with house and husband and child and all manner of things."

"'Tis no doing of mine to praise. But there's one sitting there that took me as I was and no more."

"And wedded? — Not wedded yet, no, I see."

"We'll see about it, the time this little man's to be christened," says Inger. "We'd have been wedded before, but couldn't come by it, getting down to a church and all. What do you say, Isak?"

"Wedded?" says Isak. "Why, yes, of course."

"But if as you'd help us, Oline," says Inger.

" Just to come up for a few days in the off time once, and look to the creatures here while we're away? "

Ay, Oline would do that.

" We'll see it's no loss to you after."

Why, as to that, she'd leave it to them. . . . " And you're building again, I see. Now what'll that be for? Isn't there built enough? "

Inger sees her chance and puts in here: " Why, you must ask him about that. I'm not to know."

" Building? " says Isak. " Oh, 'tis nothing to speak of. A bit of a shed, maybe, if we should need it. What's that you were saying about Goldenhorns? You'd like to see her? "

They go across to the cowshed, and there's cow and calf to show, and an ox to boot. The visitor nods her head, looking at the beasts, and at the shed; all fine as could be, and clean as couldn't be cleaner. " Trust Inger for looking after creatures every way," says Oline.

Isak puts a question: " Goldenhorns was at your place before? "

" Ay, from a calf. Not my place, though; at my son's. But 'tis all the same. And we've her mother still."

Isak had not heard better news a long while; it was a burden lighter. Goldenhorns was his and Inger's by honest right. To tell the truth, he had half thought of getting rid of his trouble in a sorry way; to kill off the cow that autumn, scrape the hide, bury the horns, and thus make away with all trace

of Cow Goldenhorns in this life. No need for that now. And he grew mightily proud of Inger all at once.

"Ay, Inger," says he. "She's one to manage things, that's true. There's not her like nor equal to be found. 'Twas a poor place here till I got a woman of my own, as you might say."

"Why, 'tis but natural so," says Oline.

And so this woman from across the hills, a soft-spoken creature with her wits about her, and by name Oline, she stayed with them a couple of days, and had the little room to sleep in. And, when she set out for home, she had a bundle of wool that Inger had given her, from the sheep. There was no call to hide that bundle of wool, but Oline took care that Isak should not see it.

Then the child and Isak and his wife again; the same world again, and the work of the day, with many little joys and big. Goldenhorns was yielding well, the goats had dropped their kids and were yielding well; Inger had a row of red and white cheeses already, stored away to get ripe. It was her plan to save up cheeses till there were enough to buy a loom. Oh, that Inger; she knew how to weave.

And Isak built a shed — he too had a plan of his own, no doubt. He set up a new wing built out from the side of the turf hut, with double panelling boards, made a doorway in it, and a neat little window with four panes; laid on a roof of outer boards, and made do with that till the ground thawed and he could get turf. All that was useful and necessary; no floor-

ing, no smooth-planed walls, but Isak had fixed up a box partition, as for a horse, and a manger.

It was nearing the end of May. The sun had thawed the high ground; Isak roofed in his shed with turf and it was finished. Then one morning he ate a meal to last for the day, took some more food with him, shouldered pick and spade, and went down to the village.

"Bring up three yards of cotton print, if you can," Inger called after him.

"What do you want with that?" said Isak.

Isak was long away; it almost seemed as if he had gone for good. Inger looked at the weather every day, noting the way of the wind, as if she were expecting a sailing-ship; she went out at nighttime to listen; even thought of taking the child on her arm and going after him. Then at last he came back, with a horse and cart. *"Ptro!"* shouted Isak as he drew up; shouted so as to be heard. And the horse was well behaved, and stood as quiet as could be, nodding at the turf hut as if it knew the place again. Nevertheless, Isak must call out, "Hi, come and hold the horse a bit, can't you?"

Out goes Inger. "Where is it now? Oh, Isak, have you hired him again? Where have you been all this time? 'Tis six days gone."

"Where d'you think I'd be? Had to go all sorts of ways round to find a road for this cart of mine. Hold the horse a bit, can't you?"

"Cart of yours! You don't mean to say you've bought that cart?"

Isak dumb; Isak swelling with things unspoken. He lifts out a plough and a harrow he has brought; nails, provisions, a grindstone, a sack of corn. "And how's the child?" he asks.

"Child's all right. Have you bought that cart, that's what I want to know? For here have I been longing and longing for a loom," says she jestingly, in her gladness at having him back again.

Isak dumb once more, for a long space, busied with his own affairs, pondering, looking round for a place to put all his goods and implements; it was hard to find room for them all. But when Inger gave up asking, and began talking to the horse instead, he came out of his lofty silence at last.

"Ever see a farm *without* a horse and cart, and plough and harrows, and all the rest of it? And since you want to know, why, I've bought that horse and cart, and all that's in it," says he.

And Inger could only shake her head and murmur: "Well, I never did see such a man!"

Isak was no longer littleness and humility; he had paid, as it were, like a gentleman, for Goldenhorns. "Here you are," he could say. "I've brought along a horse; we can call it quits."

He stood there, upright and agile, against his wont; shifted the plough once more, picked it up and carried it with one hand and stood it up against the wall. Oh, he could manage an estate! He took up the other things: the harrow, the grindstone, a new fork he had bought, all the costly agricultural implements, treasures of the new home, a grand array.

All requisite appliances — nothing was lacking.

"H'm. As for that loom, why, we'll manage that too, I dare say, as long as I've my health. And there's your cotton print; they'd none but blue, so I took that."

There was no end to the things he brought. A bottomless well, rich in all manner of things, like a city store.

Says Inger: "I wish Oline could have seen all this when she was here."

Just like a woman! Sheer senseless vanity — as if that mattered! Isak sniffed contemptuously. Though perhaps he himself would not have been displeased if Oline had been there to see.

The child was crying.

"Go in and look after the boy," said Isak. "I'll look to the horse."

He takes out the horse and leads it into the stable: ay, here is Isak putting his horse into the stable! Feeds it and strokes it and treats it tenderly. And how much was owing now, on that horse and cart? — Everything, the whole sum, a mighty debt; but it should all be paid that summer, never fear. He had stacks of cordwood to pay with, and some building bark from last year's cut, not to speak of heavy timber. There was time enough. But later on, when the pride and glory had cooled off a little, there were bitter hours of fear and anxiety; all depended on the summer and the crops; how the year turned out.

The days now were occupied in field work and

more field work; he cleared new bits of ground, getting out roots and stones; ploughing, manuring, harrowing, working with pick and spade, breaking lumps of soil and crumbling them with hand and heel; a tiller of the ground always, laying out fields like velvet carpets. He waited a couple of days longer — there was a look of rain about — and then he sowed his corn.

For generations back, into forgotten time, his fathers before him had sowed corn; solemnly, on a still, calm evening, best with a gentle fall of warm and misty rain, soon after the grey goose flight. Potatoes were a new thing, nothing mystic, nothing religious; women and children could plant them — earth-apples that came from foreign parts, like coffee; fine rich food, but much like swedes and mangolds. Corn was nothing less than bread; corn or no corn meant life or death.

Isak walked bareheaded, in Jesu name, a sower. Like a tree-stump with hands to look at, but in his heart like a child. Every cast was made with care, in a spirit of kindly resignation. Look! the tiny grains that are to take life and grow, shoot up into ears, and give more corn again; so it is throughout all the earth where corn is sown. Palestine, America, the valleys of Norway itself — a great wide world, and here is Isak, a tiny speck in the midst of it all, a sower. Little showers of corn flung out fanwise from his hand; a kindly clouded sky, with a promise of the faintest little misty rain.

Chapter IV

IT was the slack time between the seasons, but the woman Oline did not come.

Isak was free of the soil now; he had two scythes and two rakes ready for the haymaking; he made long bottom boards for the cart for getting in the hay, and procured a couple of runners and some suitable wood to make a sledge for the winter. Many useful things he did. Even to shelves. He set up a pair of shelves inside the house, as an excellent place to keep various things, such as an almanac — he had bought one at last — and ladles and vessels not in use. Inger thought a deal of those two shelves.

Inger was easily pleased; she thought a great deal of everything. There was Goldenhorns, for instance, no fear of her running away now, with the calf and bull to play with; she ran about in the woods all day long. The goats too were thriving, their heavy udders almost dragging on the ground. Inger made a long robe of blue cotton print, and a little cap of the same stuff, as pretty as could be — and that was for the christening. The boy himself watched her at work many a time; a blessed wonder of a boy he was, and if she was so bent on calling him Eleseus, why, Isak supposed she must have her way.

When the robe was finished, it had a long train to it, nigh on a yard and a half of cotton print, and every inch of it money spent; but what of that — the child was their first-born.

"What about those beads of yours?" said Isak. "If as they're ever to be used at all . . ."

Oh, but Inger had thought of them already, those beads of hers. Trust a mother for that. Inger said nothing, and was very proud. The beads were none so many; they would not make a necklace for the boy, but they would look pretty stitched on the front of his cap, and there they should be.

But Oline did not come.

If it had not been for the cattle, they could have gone off all three of them, and come back a few days later with the child properly christened. And if it had not been for that matter of getting wedded, Inger might have gone by herself.

"If we put off the wedding business for a bit?" said Isak. But Inger was loth to put it off; it would be ten or twelve years at least before Eleseus was old enough to stay behind and look to the milking while they went.

No, Isak must use his brains to find a way. The whole thing had come about somehow without their knowing; maybe the wedding business was just as important as the christening — how should he know? The weather looked like drought — a thoroughly wicked drought; if the rain did not come before long, their crops would be burnt up. But all was in the hand of God. Isak made ready to go down

to the village and find some one to come up. All those miles again!

And all that fuss just to be wed and christened! Ay, outlying folks had many troubles, great and small.

At last Oline did come. . . .

And now they were wedded and christened, everything decently in order; they had remembered to have the wedding first, so the child could be christened as of a wedded pair. But the drought kept on, and the tiny cornfields were parched, those velvet carpets parched — and why? 'Twas all in the hand of God. Isak mowed his bits of meadow; there was little grass on them for all he had manured them well that spring. He mowed and mowed on the hillsides, farther and farther out; mowing and turning and carting home loads of hay, as if he would never tire — for he had a horse already, and a well-stocked farm. But by mid-July he had to cut the corn for green fodder, there was no help for it. And now all depended on the potato crop.

What was that about potatoes? Were they just a thing from foreign parts, like coffee; a luxury, an extra? Oh, the potato is a lordly fruit; drought or downpour, it grows and grows all the same. It laughs at the weather, and will stand anything; only deal kindly with it, and it yields fifteen-fold again. Not the blood of a grape, but the flesh of a chestnut, to be boiled or roasted, used in every way. A man may lack corn to make bread, but give him potatoes and he will not starve. Roast them in the

embers, and there is supper; boil them in water, and there's a breakfast ready. As for meat, it's little is needed beside. Potatoes can be served with what you please; a dish of milk, a herring, is enough. The rich eat them with butter; poor folk manage with a tiny pinch of salt. Isak could make a feast of them on Sundays, with a mess of cream from Goldenhorns' milk. Poor despised potato — a blessed thing!

But now — things look black even for the potato crop.

Isak looked at the sky unnumbered times in the day. And the sky was blue. Many an evening it looked as if a shower were coming. Isak would go in and say, "Like as not we'll be getting that rain after all." And a couple of hours later all would be as hopeless as before.

The drought had lasted seven weeks now, and the heat was serious; the potatoes stood all the time in flower; flowering marvellously, unnaturally. The cornfields looked from a distance as if under snow. Where was it all to end? The almanac said nothing — almanacs nowadays were not what they used to be; an almanac now was no good at all. Now it looked like rain again, and Isak went in to Inger: "We'll have rain this night, God willing."

"Is it looking that way?"

"Ay. And the horse is shivering a bit, like they will."

Inger glanced towards the door and said, "Ay, you see, 'twill come right enough."

A few drops fell. Hours passed, they had their supper, and when Isak went out in the night to look, the sky was blue.

"Well, well," said Inger; "anyway, 'twill give the last bit of lichen another day to dry," said she to comfort him all she could.

Isak had been getting lichen, as much as he could, and had a fine lot, all of the best. It was good fodder, and he treated it as he would hay, covering it over with bark in the woods. There was only a little still left out, and now, when Inger spoke of it, he answered despairingly, as if it were all one, "I'll not take it in if it is dry."

"Isak, you don't mean it!" said Inger.

And next day, sure enough, he did not take it in. He left it out and never touched it, just as he had said. Let it stay where it was, there'd be no rain anyway; let it stay where it was in God's name! He could take it in some time before Christmas, if so be as the sun hadn't burnt it all up to nothing.

Isak was deeply and thoroughly offended. It was no longer a pleasure and a delight to sit outside on the door-slab and look out over his lands and be the owner of it all. There was the potato field flowering madly, and drying up; let the lichen stay where it was — what did he care? That Isak! Who could say; perhaps he had a bit of a sly little thought in his mind for all his stolid simpleness; maybe he knew what he was doing after all, trying to tempt the blue sky now, at the change of the moon.

That evening it looked like rain once more. "You

ought to have got that lichen in," said Inger.

"What for?" said Isak, looking all surprised.

"Ay, you with your nonsense — but it might be rain after all."

"There'll be no rain this year, you can see for yourself."

But for all that, it grew curiously dark in the night. They could see through the glass window that it was darker — ay, and as if something beat against the panes, something wet, whatever it might be. Inger woke up. "'Tis rain! look at the windowpanes."

But Isak only sniffed. "Rain? — not a bit of it. Don't know what you're talking about."

"Ah, it's no good pretending," said Inger.

Isak was pretending — ay, that was it. Rain it was, sure enough, and a good heavy shower — but as soon as it had rained enough to spoil Isak's lichen, it stopped. The sky was blue. "What did I say," said Isak, stiff-necked and hard.

The shower made no difference to the potato crop, and days came and went; the sky was blue. Isak set to work on his timber sledge, worked hard at it, and bowed his heart, and planed away humbly at runners and shafts. Eyah, *Herregud!* Ay, the days came and went, and the child grew. Inger churned and made cheeses; there was no serious danger; folk that had their wits about them and could work need not die for the sake of one bad year. Moreover, after nine weeks, there came a regular blessing of rain, rain all one day and night, and six-

teen hours of it pouring as hard as it could. If it had come but two weeks back, Isak would have said, "It's too late now!" As it was, he said to Inger, "You see, that'll save some of the potatoes."

"Ay," said Inger hopefully. "It'll save the lot, you'll see."

And now things were looking better. Rain every day; good, thorough showers. Everything looking green again, as by a miracle. The potatoes were flowering still, worse than before, and with big berries growing out at the tops, which was not as it should be; but none could say what might be at the roots — Isak had not ventured to look. Then one day Inger went out and found over a score of little potatoes under one plant. "And they've five weeks more to grow in," said Inger. Oh, that Inger, always trying to comfort and speak hopefully through her hare-lip. It was not pretty to hear when she spoke, for a sort of hissing, like steam from a leaky valve, but a comfort all the same out in the wilds. And a happy and cheerful soul she was at all times.

"I wish you could manage to make another bed," she said to Isak one day.

"Ho!" said he.

"Why, there's no hurry, but still . . ."

They started getting in the potatoes, and finished by Michaelmas, as the custom is. It was a middling year — a good year; once again it was seen that potatoes didn't care so much about the weather, but grew up all the same, and could stand a deal. A middling year — a good year . . . well, not per-

haps, if they worked it out exactly, but that they couldn't do this year. A Lapp had passed that way one day and said how fine their potatoes were up there; it was much worse, he said, down in the village.

And now Isak had a few weeks more to work the ground before the frost set in. The cattle were out, grazing where they pleased; it was good to work with them about, and hear the bells, though it did take some of his time now and again. There was the bull, mischievous beast, would take to butting at the lichen stacks; and as for the goats, they were high and low and everywhere, even to the roof of the hut.

Troubles great and small.

One day Isak heard a sudden shout; Inger stood on the door-slab with the child in her arms, pointing over to the bull and the pretty little cow Silverhorns — they were making love. Isak threw down his pick and raced over to the pair, but it was too late, by the look of it. The mischief was done. "Oh, the little rascal, she's all too young — half a year too soon, a child!" Isak got her into the hut, but it was too late.

"Well, well," says Inger, "'tis none so bad after all, in a way; if she'd waited, we'd have had both of them bearing at the same time." Oh, that Inger; not so bright as some, maybe, yet, for all that, she may well have known what she was about when she let the pair loose together that morning.

Winter came, Inger carding and spinning, Isak

driving down with loads of wood; fine dry wood and good going; all his debts paid off and settled; horse and cart, plough and harrow his very own. He drove down with Inger's goats' milk cheeses, and brought back woollen thread, a loom, shuttles and beam and all; brought back flour and provisions, more planks, and boards and nails; one day he brought home a lamp.

"As true as I'm here I won't believe it," says Inger. But she had long had in her mind about a lamp for all that. They lit it the same evening, and were in paradise; little Eleseus he thought, no doubt, it was the sun. "Look how he stares all wondering like," said Isak. And now Inger could spin of an evening by lamplight.

He brought up linen for shirts, and new hide shoes for Inger. She had asked for some dye-stuffs, too, for the wool, and he brought them. Then one day he came back with a clock. With what? — A clock. This was too much for Inger; she was overwhelmed and could not say a word. Isak hung it up on the wall, and set it at a guess, wound it up, and let it strike. The child turned its eyes at the sound and then looked at its mother. "Ay, you may wonder," said Inger, and took the child to her, not a little touched herself. Of all good things, here in a lonely place, there was nothing could be better than a clock to go all the dark winter through, and strike so prettily at the hours.

When the last load was carted down, Isak turned woodman once more, felling and stacking, building

his streets, his town of wood-piles for next winter. He was getting farther and farther from the homestead now, there was a great broad stretch of hillside all ready for tillage. He would not cut close any more, but simply throw the biggest trees with dry tops.

He knew well enough, of course, what Inger had been thinking of when she asked for another bed; best to hurry up and get it ready. One dark evening he came home from the woods, and sure enough, Inger had got it over — another boy — and was lying down. That Inger! Only that very morning she had tried to get him to go down to the village again: "'Tis time the horse had something to do," says she. "Eating his head off all day."

"I've no time for such-like nonsense," said Isak shortly, and went out. Now he understood; she had wanted to get him out of the way. And why? Surely 'twas as well to have him about the house.

"Why can't you ever tell a man what's coming?" said he.

"You make a bed for yourself and sleep in the little room," said Inger.

As for that, it was not only a bedstead to make; there must be bedclothes to spread. They had but one skin rug, and there would be no getting another till next autumn, when there were wethers to kill — and even then two skins would not make a blanket. Isak had a hard time, with cold at nights, for a while; he tried burying himself in the hay under the rock-shelter, tried to bed down for himself with the

cows. Isak was homeless. Well for him that it was May; soon June would be in; July. . . .

A wonderful deal they had managed, out there in the wilderness; house for themselves and housing for the cattle, and ground cleared and cultivated, all in three years. Isak was building again — what was he building now? A new shed, a lean-to, jutting out from the house. The whole place rang with the noise as he hammered in his eight-inch nails. Inger came out now and again and said it was trying for the little ones.

" Ay, the little ones — go in and talk to them then, sing a bit. Eleseus, he can have a bucket lid to hammer on himself. And it's only while I'm doing these big nails just here, at the cross-beams, that's got to bear the whole. Only planks after that, two-and-a-half-inch nails, as gentle as building dolls' houses."

Small wonder if Isak hammered and thumped. There stood a barrel of herrings, and the flour, and all kinds of food-stuffs in the stable; better than lying out in the open, maybe, but the pork tasted of it already; a shed they must have, and that was clear. As for the little ones, they'd get used to the noise in no time. Eleseus was inclined to be ailing somehow, but the other took nourishment sturdily, like a fat cherub, and when he wasn't crying, he slept. A wonder of a child! Isak made no objection to his being called Sivert, though he himself would rather have preferred Jacob. Inger could hit on the right thing at times. Eleseus was named after the priest of her parish, and that was a fine name to be sure; but

Sivert was called after his mother's uncle, the district treasurer, who was a well-to-do man, with neither wife nor child to come after him. They couldn't do better than name the boy after him.

Then came spring, and the new season's work; all was down in the earth before Whitsun. When there had been only Eleseus to look after, Inger could never find time to help her husband, being tied to her first-born; now, with two children in the house, it was different; she helped in the fields and managed a deal of odd work here and there; planting potatoes, sowing carrots and turnips. A wife like that is none so easy to find. And she had her loom besides; at all odd minutes she would slip into the little room and weave a couple of spools, making half-wool stuff for underclothes for the winter. Then when she had dyed her wools, it was red and blue dress material for herself and the little ones; at last she put in several colours, and made a bedspread for Isak all by herself. No fancy work from Inger's loom; useful and necessary things, and sound all through.

Oh, they were doing famously, these settlers in the wilds; they had got on so far, and if this year's crops turned out well they would be enviable folk, no less. What was lacking on the place at all? A hayloft, perhaps; a big barn with a threshing-floor inside — but that might come in time. Ay, it would come, never fear, only give then time. And now pretty Silverhorns had calved, the sheep had lambs, the goats had kids, the young stock fairly swarmed about

the place. And what of the little household itself? Eleseus could walk already, walk by himself wherever he pleased, and little Sivert was christened. Inger? By all signs and tokens, making ready for another turn; she was not what you'd call niggardly at bearing. Another child — oh, a mere nothing to Inger! Though, to be sure, she was proud enough of them when they came. Fine little creatures, as any one could see. 'Twas not all, by a long way, that the Lord had blessed with such fine big children. Inger was young, and making the most of it. She was no beauty, and had suffered all her girlhood by reason of the same, being set aside and looked down on. The young men never noticed her, though she could dance and work as well. They found nothing sweet in her, and turned elsewhere. But now her time had come; she was in full flower and constantly with child. Isak himself, her lord and master, was earnest and stolid as ever, but he had got on well, and was content. How he had managed to live till Inger came was a mystery; feeding, no doubt, on potatoes and goats' milk, or maybe venturesome dishes without a name; now, he had all that a man could think of in his place in the world.

There came another drought, a new bad year. Os-Anders the Lapp, coming by with his dog, brought news that folk in the village had cut their corn already, for fodder.

"'Tis a poor look out," said Inger, "when it comes to that."

"Ay. But they've the herring. A fine haul, 'tis

said. Your Uncle Sivert, he's going to build a country house."

"Why, he was none so badly off before."

"That's true. And like to be the same with you, for all it seems."

"Why, as to that, thank God, we've enough for our little needs. What do they say at home about me up here?"

Os-Anders wags his head helplessly; there's no end to the great things they say; more than he can tell. A pleasant-spoken fellow, like all the Lapps.

"If as you'd care for a dish of milk now, you've only to say so," says Inger.

"'Tis more than's worth your while. But if you've a sup for the dog here. . . ."

Milk for Os-Anders, and food for the dog. Os-Anders lifts his head suddenly, at a kind of music inside the house.

"What's that?"

"'Tis only our clock," says Inger. "It strikes the hours that way." Inger bursting with pride.

The Lapp wags his head again: "House and cattle and all manner of things. There's nothing a man could think of but you've that thing."

"Ay, we've much to be thankful for, 'tis true."

"I forgot to say, there's Oline was asking after you."

"Oline? How is it with her?"

"She's none so poorly. Where will your husband be now?"

"He'll be at work in the fields somewhere."

"They say he's not bought yet," says the Lapp carelessly.

"Bought? Who says so?"

"Why, 'tis what they say."

"But who's he to buy from? 'Tis common land."

"Ay, 'tis so."

"And sweat of his brow to every spade of it."

"Why, they say 'tis the State owns all the land."

Inger could make nothing of this. "Ay, maybe so. Was it Oline said so?"

"I don't well remember," says the Lapp, and his shifty eyes looked all ways around.

Inger wondered why he did not beg for anything; Os-Anders always begged, as do all the Lapps. Os-Anders sits scraping at the bowl of his clay pipe, and and lights up. What a pipe! He puffs and draws at it till his wrinkled old face looks like a wizard's runes.

"No need to ask if the little ones there are yours," says he, flattering again. "They're as like you as could be. The living image of yourself when you were small."

Now Inger was a monster and a deformity to look at; 'twas all wrong, of course, but she swelled with pride for all that. Even a Lapp can gladden a mother's heart.

"If it wasn't that your sack there's so full, I'd find you something to put in it," says Inger.

"Nay, 'tis more than's worth your while."

Inger goes inside with the child on her arm;

Eleseus stays outside with the Lapp. The two make friends at once; the child sees something curious in the sack, something soft and fluffy, and wants to pat it. The dog stands alert, barking and whining. Inger comes out with a parcel of food; she gives a cry, and drops down on the door-slab.

"What's that you've got there? What is it?"

"'Tis nothing. Only a hare."

"I saw it."

"'Twas the boy wanted to look. Dog ran it down this morning and killed it, and I brought it along. . . ."

"Here's your food," said Inger.

Chapter V

ONE bad year never comes alone. Isak had grown patient, and took what fell to his lot. The corn was parched, and the hay was poor, but the potatoes looked like pulling through once more — bad enough, all things together, but not the worst. Isak had still a season's yield of cordwood and timber to sell in the village, and the herring fishery had been rich all round the coast, so there was plenty of money to buy wood. Indeed, it almost looked like a providence that the corn harvest had failed — for how could he have threshed it without a barn and threshing-floor? Call it providence; there's no harm in that sometimes.

There were other things not so easily put out of mind. What was it a certain Lapp had said to Inger that summer — something about not having bought? Buy, what should he buy for? The ground was there, the forest was there; he had cleared and tilled, built up a homestead in the midst of a natural wilderness, winning bread for himself and his, asking nothing of any man, but working, and working alone. He had often thought himself of asking the Lensmand [1] about the matter when

[1] Sheriff's officer, in charge of a small district.

he went down to the village, but had always put it off; the Lensmand was not a pleasant man to deal with, so people said, and Isak was not one to talk much. What could he say if he went — what had he come for?

One day that winter the Lensmand himself came driving up to the place. There was a man with him, and a lot of papers in a bag. Geissler himself, the Lensmand, no less. He looked at the broad open hillside, cleared of timber, smooth and unbroken under the snow; he thought perhaps that it was all tilled land already, for he said:

"Why, this is a whole big farm you've got. You don't expect to get all this for nothing?"

There it was! Isak was terror-stricken and said not a word.

"You ought to have come to me at first, and bought the land," said Geissler.

"Ay."

The Lensmand talked of valuations, of boundaries, taxes, taxes to the State, and, when he had explained the matter a little, Isak began to see that there was something reasonable in it after all. The Lensmand turned to his companion teasingly. "Now then, you call yourself a surveyor, what's the extent of cultivated ground here?" He did not wait for the other to reply, but noted down himself, at a guess. Then he asked Isak about the crops, how much hay, how many bushels of potatoes. And then about boundaries. They could not go round the place marking out waist-deep in snow; and in

summer no one could get up there at all. What did Isak think himself about the extent of woodland and pasturage? — Isak had no idea at all; he had always thought of the place as being his own as far as he could see. The Lensmand said that the State required definite boundaries. "And the greater the extent, the more you will have to pay."

"Ay."

"And they won't give you all you think you can swallow; they'll let you have what's reasonable for your needs."

"Ay."

Inger brought in some milk for the visitors; they drank it, and she brought in some more. The Lensmand a surly fellow? He stroked Eleseus' hair, and looked at something the child was playing with. "Playing with stones, what? Let me see. H'm, heavy. Looks like some kind of ore."

"There's plenty such up in the hills," said Isak.

The Lensmand came back to business. "South and west from here's what you want most, I suppose? Shall we say a couple of furlongs to the southward?"

"Two furlongs!" exclaimed his assistant.

"*You* couldn't till two hundred yards," said his chief shortly.

"What will that cost?" asked Isak.

"Can't say. It all depends. But I'll put it as low as I can on my report; it's miles away from anywhere, and difficult to get at."

"But two furlongs!" said the assistant again.

The Lensmand entered duly, two furlongs to the southward, and asked: "What about the hills? How much do you want that way?"

"I'll need all up as far as the water. There's a big water up there," said Isak.

The Lensmand noted that. "And how far north?"

"Why, it's no great matter that way. 'Tis but moorland most, and little timber."

The Lensmand fixed the northward boundary at one furlong. "East?"

"That's no great matter either. 'Tis bare fjeld all from here into Sweden."

The Lensmand noted down again. He made a rapid calculation, and said: "It'll make a good-sized place, even at that. Anywhere near the village, of course, it'd be worth a lot of money; nobody could have bought it. I'll send in a report, and say a hundred *Daler* would be fair. What do you think?" he asked his assistant.

"It's giving it away," said the other.

"A hundred *Daler?*" said Inger. "Isak, you've no call to take so big a place."

"No — o," said Isak.

The assistant put in hurriedly: "That's just what I say. It's miles too big for you as it is. What will you do with it?"

"Cultivate it," said the Lensmand.

He had been sitting there writing and working in his head, with the children crying every now and then; he did not want to have the whole thing to do

again. As it was, he would not be home till late that night, perhaps not before morning. He thrust the papers into the bag; the matter was settled.

"Put the horse in," he said to his companion. And turning to Isak: "As a matter of fact, they ought to give you the place for nothing, and pay you into the bargain, the way you've worked. I'll say as much when I send in the report. Then we'll see how much the State will ask for the title-deeds."

Isak — it was hard to say how he felt about it. Half as if he were not ill-pleased after all to find his land valued at a big price, after the work he had done. As for the hundred *Daler,* he could manage to pay that off, no doubt, in course of time. He made no further business about it; he could go on working as he had done hitherto, clearing and cultivating, fetching loads of timber from the untended woodlands. Isak was not a man to look about anxiously for what might come; he worked.

Inger thanked the Lensmand, and hoped he would put in a word for them with the State.

"Yes, yes. But I've no say in the matter myself. All I have to do is to say what I have seen, and what I think. How old is the youngest there?"

"Six months as near as can be."

"Boy or girl?"

"Boy."

The Lensmand was no tyrant, but shallow, and not overconscientious. He ignored his assistant, Brede Olsen, who by virtue of his office should be an expert in such affairs; the matter was settled out

of hand, by guesswork. Yet for Isak and his wife it was a serious matter enough — ay, and for who should come after them, maybe for generations. But he set it all down, as it pleased him, making a document of it on the spot. Withal a kindly man; he took a bright coin from his pocket and gave it to little Sivert; then he nodded to the others and went out to the sledge.

Suddenly he asked: "What do you call the place?"

"Call it?"

"Yes. What's its name? We must have a name for it."

No one had ever thought of that before. Inger and Isak looked at each other.

"Sellanraa?" said the Lensmand. He must have invented it out of his own head; maybe it was not a name at all. But he only nodded, and said again, "Sellanraa!" and drove off.

Settled again, at a guess, anything would do. The name, the price, the boundaries. . . .

Some weeks later, when Isak was down in the village, he heard rumours of some business about Lensmand Geissler; there had been an inquiry about some moneys he could not account for, and the matter had been reported to his superior. Well, such things did happen; some folk were content to stumble through life anyhow, till they ran up against those that walked.

Then one day Isak went down with a load of wood, and coming back, who should drive with him

on his sledge but Lensmand Geissler. He stepped out from the trees, on to the road, waved his hand, and simply said: "Take me along, will you?"

They drove for a while, neither speaking. Once the passenger took a flask from his pocket and drank; offered it to Isak, who declined. "I'm afraid this journey will upset my stomach," said the Lensmand.

He began at once to talk about Isak's deal in land. "I sent off the report at once, with a strong recommendation on my own account. Sellanraa's a nice name. As a matter of fact, they ought to let you have the place for nothing, wouldn't do to say so, of course. If I had, they'd only have taken offence and put their own price on it. I suggested fifty *Daler*."

"Ho. Fifty, you said? Not a hundred?"

The Lensmand puckered his brow and thought a moment. "As far as I recollect it was fifty. Yes. . . ."

"And where will you be going, now?" asked Isak.

"Over to Vesterbotten, to my wife's people."

"'Tis none so easy that way at this time of year."

"I'll manage. Couldn't you go with me a bit?"

"Ay; you shan't go alone."

They came to the farm, and the Lensmand stayed the night, sleeping in the little room. In the morning, he brought out his flask again, and remarked: "I'm sure this journey's going to upset my stomach." For the rest, he was much the same as last time, kindly, decisive, but fussy, and little concerned about his own affairs. Possibly it might not be so bad after all. Isak ventured to point out that the hill-

side was not all under cultivation yet, but only some small squares here and there. The Lensmand took the information in a curious fashion. "I knew that well enough, of course, last time I was here, when I made out the report. But Brede, the fellow who was with me, he didn't see it. Brede, he's no earthly good. But they work it out by table. With all the ground as I entered it, and only so few loads of hay, so few bushels of potatoes, they'll say at once that it must be poor soil, cheap soil, you understand. I did my best for you, and you take my word for it, that'll do the trick. It's two and thirty thousand fellows of your stamp the country wants."

The Lensmand nodded and turned to Inger. "How old's the youngest?"

"He's just three-quarters of a year."

"And a boy, is he?"

"Yes."

"But you must see and get that business settled as soon as ever you can," said he to Isak again. "There's another man wants to purchase now, midway between here and the village, and as soon as he does, this'll be worth more. You buy now, get the place first, and let the price go up after — that way, you'll be getting some return for all the work you've put into it. It was you that started cultivating here at all. 'Twas all wilderness before."

They were grateful for his advice, and asked if it was not he himself that would arrange the matter. He answered that he had done all he could; every-

thing now depended on the State. "I'm going across to Vesterbotten now, and I shan't be coming back," he told them straightforwardly.

He gave Inger an *Ort,* and that was overmuch. "You can take a bit of meat down to my people in the village next time you're killing," said he. "My wife'll pay you. Take a cheese or so, too, any time you can. The children like it."

Isak went with him up over the hills; it was firm, good going on the higher ground, easier than below. Isak received a whole *Daler.*

In that manner was it Lensmand Geissler left the place, and he did not come back. No great loss, folk said, he being looked on as a doubtful personage, an adventurer. Not that he hadn't the knowledge; he was a learned man, and had studied this and that, but he lived too freely, and spent other people's money. It came out later that he had left the place after a sharp reprimand from his superior, Amtmand Pleym; but nothing was done about his family officially, and they went on living there a good while after — his wife and three children. And it was not long before the money unaccounted for was sent from Sweden, so that Geissler's wife and children could not be said to be held as hostages, but stayed on simply because it pleased them.

Isak and Inger had no cause to complain of Geissler's dealings with them, not by a long way. And there was no saying what sort of man his successor would be — perhaps they would have to go over the whole business again!

The Amtmand [1] sent one of his clerks up to the village, to be the new Lensmand. He was a man about forty, son of a local magistrate, by name Heyerdahl. He had lacked the means to go to the university and enter the service that way; instead, he had been constrained to sit in an office, writing at a desk, for fifteen years. He was unmarried, having never been able to afford a wife. His chief, Amtmand Pleym, had inherited him from his predecessor, and paid him the same miserable wage that had been given before; Heyerdahl took it, and went on writing at his desk as before.

Isak plucked up his courage, and went to see him.

"Documents in the Sellanraa case . . . ? Here they are, just returned from the Department. They want to know all sorts of things — the whole business is in a dreadful muddle, as Geissler left it," said the official. "The Department wishes to be informed as to whether any considerable crop of marketable berries is to be reckoned with on the estate. Whether there is any heavy timber. Whether possibly there may be ores or metals of value in the hills adjoining. Mention is made of water, but nothing stated as to any fishery in the same. This Geissler appears to have furnished certain information, but he's not to be trusted, and here have I to go through the whole affair again after him. I shall have to come up to Sellanraa and make a thorough inspection and valuation. How many miles is it up there? The Department, of course, requires that adequate

[1] Governor of a county.

boundaries be drawn: yes, we shall have to beat the bounds in due order."

"'Tis no light business setting up boundaries this time of year," said Isak. "Not till later on in the summer."

"Anyhow, it'll have to be done. The Department can't wait all through the summer for an answer. I'll come up myself as soon as I can get away. I shall have to be out that way in any case, there's another plot of land a man's inquiring about."

"Will that be him that's going to buy up between me and the village?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. Very likely. As a matter of fact, it's a man from the office here, my assistant in the office. He was here in Geissler's time. Asked Geissler about it, I understand, but Geissler put him off; said he couldn't cultivate a hundred yards of land. So he sent in an application to the Amtmand, and I'm instructed to see the matter through. More of Geissler's muddling!"

Lensmand Heyerdahl came up to the farm, and brought with him his assistant, Brede. They had got thoroughly wet crossing the moors, and wetter still they were before they'd finished tramping the boundary lines through melting snow and slush up and down the hills. The Lensmand set to work zealously the first day, but on the second he had had enough, and contented himself with standing still for the most part, pointing and shouting directions. There was no further talk about prospecting for ore in the "adjoining hills," and as for marketable ber-

ries — they would have a look at the moors on the way back, he said.

The Department requested information on quite a number of points — there were tables for all sorts of things, no doubt. The only thing that seemed reasonable was the question of timber. Certainly, there was some heavy timber, and that within the limits of Isak's proposed holding, but not enough to reckon with for sale; no more than would be required to keep up the place. Even if there had been timber in plenty, who was to carry it all the many miles to where it could be sold? Only Isak, trundling like a tub-wheel through the forest in winter-time carting some few heavy sticks down to the village, to bring back planks and boards for his building.

Geissler, the incomprehensible, had, it seemed, sent in a report which was not easily upset. Here was his successor going through the whole thing again, trying to find mistakes and blatant inaccuracies — but all in vain. It was noticeable that he consulted his assistant at every turn, and paid heed to what he said, which was not Geissler's way at all. That same assistant, moreover, must presumably have altered his own opinion, since he was now a would-be purchaser himself of lands from the common ground held by the State.

"What about the price?" asked the Lensmand.

"Fifty *Daler* is the most they can fairly ask of any buyer," answered the expert.

Lensmand Heyerdahl drew up his report in elegant phrasing. Geissler had written: "The man

will also have to pay land tax every year; he cannot afford to pay more for the place than fifty *Daler,* in annual instalments over ten years. The State can accept his offer, or take away his land and the fruits of his work." Heyerdahl wrote: "He now humbly begs to submit this application to the Department: that he be allowed to retain this land, upon which, albeit without right of possession, he has up to this present effected considerable improvements, for a purchase price of 50 — fifty —*Speciedaler,* the amount to be paid in annual instalments as may seem fit to the Department to apportion the same."

Lensmand Heyerdahl promised Isak to do his best. "I hope to succeed in procuring you possession of the estate," he said.

Chapter VI

THE big bull is to be sent away. It has grown to an enormous beast, and costs too much to feed; Isak is taking it down to the village, to bring up a suitable yearling in exchange.

It was Inger's idea. And Inger had no doubt her own reasons for getting Isak out of the place on that particular day.

"If you are going at all, you'd better go today," she said. "The bull's in fine condition; 'twill fetch a good price at this time of year. You take him down to the village, and they'll send him to be sold in town — townsfolk pay anything for their meat."

"Ay," says Isak.

"If only the beast doesn't make trouble on the way down."

Isak made no answer.

"But he's been out and about now this last week, and getting used to things."

Isak was silent. He took a big knife, hung it in a sheath at his waist, and led out the bull.

A mighty beast it was, glossy-coated and terrible to look at, swaying at the buttocks as it walked. A trifle short in the leg; when it ran, it crushed down the undergrowth with its chest; it was like a railway engine. Its neck was huge almost to deformity; there was the strength of an elephant in that neck.

" If only he doesn't get mad with you," said Inger.

Isak thought for a moment. " Why, if as he takes it that way, I'll just have to slaughter him half-way and carry down the meat."

Inger sat down on the door-slab. She was in pain; her face was aflame. She had kept her feet till Isak was gone; now he and the bull were out of sight, and she could give way to a groan without fear. Little Eleseus can talk a little already; he asks: " Mama hurt? "—" Yes, hurt." He mimics her, pressing his hands to his sides and groaning. Little Sivert is asleep.

Inger takes Eleseus inside the house, gives him some things to play with on the floor, and gets into bed herself. Her time was come. She is perfectly conscious all the while, keeps an eye on Eleseus, glances at the clock on the wall to see the time. Never a cry, hardly a movement; the struggle is in her vitals — a burden is loosened and glides from her. Almost at the same moment she hears a strange cry in the bed, a blessed little voice; poor thing, poor little thing . . . and now she cannot rest, but lifts herself up and looks down. What is it? Her face is grey and blank in a moment, without expression or intelligence; a groan is heard; unnatural, impossible — a choking gasp.

She slips back on the bed. A minute passes; she cannot rest, the little cry down there in the bed grows louder, she raises herself once more, and sees — O God, the direst of all! No mercy, no hope — and this a girl!

Isak could not have gone more than a couple of miles or so. It was hardly an hour since he had left. In less than ten minutes Inger had borne her child and killed it. . . .

Isak came back on the third day, leading a half-starved yearling bull. The beast could hardly walk; it had been a long business getting up to the place at all.

"How did you get on?" asked Inger. She herself was ill and miserable enough.

Isak had managed very well. True, the big bull had been mad the last two miles or so, and he had to tie it up and fetch help from the village. Then, when he got back, it had broken loose and took a deal of time to find. But he had managed somehow, and had sold for a good price to a trader in the village, buying up for butchers in the town. "And here's the new one," said Isak. "Let the children come and look."

Any addition to the live stock was a great event. Inger looked at the bull and felt it over, asked what it had cost; little Sivert was allowed to sit on its back. "I shall miss the big one, though," said Inger. "So glossy and fine he was. I do hope they'll kill him nicely."

It was the busy season now, and there was work enough. The animals were let loose; in the empty shed were cases and bins of potatoes left to grow. Isak sowed more corn this year than last, and did all he could to get it nicely down. He made beds for

carrots and turnips, and Inger sowed the seeds. All went on as before.

Inger went about for some time with a bag of hay under her dress, to hide any change in her figure, taking out a little from time to time, and finally discarding the bag altogether. At last, one day, Isak noticed something, and asked in surprise:

"Why, how's this? Hasn't anything happened? I thought. . . ."

"No. Not this time."

"Ho. Why, what was wrong?"

"'Twas meant to be so, I suppose. Isak, how long d'you think it'll take you to work over all this land of ours?"

"Yes, but . . . you mean you had your trouble — didn't go as it should?"

"Ay, that was it — yes."

"But yourself — you're not hurt anyway after it?"

"No. Isak, I've been thinking, we ought to have a pig."

Isak was not quick to change the subject that way. He was silent a little, then at last he said: "Ay, a pig. I've thought of that myself each spring. But we'll need to have more potatoes first, and more of the small, and a bit of corn beside; we've not enough to feed a pig. We'll see how this year turns out."

"But it would be nice to have a pig."

"Ay."

Days pass, rain comes, fields and meadows are

looking well — oh, the year will turn out well, never fear! Little happenings and big, all in their turn: food, sleep, and work; Sundays, with washing of faces and combing of hair, and Isak sitting about in a new red shirt of Inger's weaving and sewing. Then an event, a happening of note in the ordinary round: a sheep, roaming with her lamb, gets caught in a cleft among the rocks. The others come home in the evening. Inger at once sees there are two missing, and out goes Isak in search. Isak's first thought is to be thankful it is Sunday, so he is not called away from his work and losing time. He tramps off — there is an endless range of ground to be searched; and, meanwhile, the house is all anxiety. Mother hushes the children with brief words; there are two sheep missing, and they must be good. All share the feeling; what has happened is a matter for the whole little community. Even the cows know that something unusual is going on, and give tongue in their own fashion, for Inger goes out every now and then, calling aloud towards the woods, though it is near night. It is an event in the wilderness, a general misfortune. Now and again she gives a long-drawn hail to Isak, but there is no answer; he must be out of hearing.

Where are the sheep — what can have come to them? Is there a bear abroad? Or have the wolves come down over the hills from Sweden and Finland? Neither, as it turns out. Isak finds the ewe stuck fast in a cleft of rock, with a broken leg and lacerated udder. It must have been there some

time, for, despite its wounds, the poor thing has nibbled the grass down to the roots as far as it could reach. Isak lifts the sheep and sets it free; it falls to grazing at once. The lamb makes for its mother and sucks away — a blessed relief for the wounded udder to be emptied now.

Isak gathers stones and fills up the dangerous cleft; a wicked place; it shall break no more sheep's thighs! Isak wears leather braces; he takes them off now and fastens them round the sheep's middle, as a support for the udder. Then, lifting the animal on his shoulders, he sets off home, the lamb at his heels.

After that — splints and tar bandages. In a few days' time the patient begins twitching the foot of the wounded leg; it is the fracture aching as it grows together. Ay, all things getting well again — until next time something happens.

The daily round; little matters that are all important to the settler-folk themselves. Oh, they are not trifles after all, but things of fate, making for their happiness and comfort and well-being, or against them.

In the slack time between the seasons, Isak smooths down some new tree-trunks he has thrown; to be used for something or other, no doubt. Also he digs out a number of useful stones and gets them down to the house; as soon as there are stones enough, he builds a wall of them. A year or so back, Inger would have been curious, wondering what her man was after with all this — now, she seemed

for the most part busied with her own work, and asked no questions. Inger is busy as ever, but she has taken to singing, which is something new, and she is teaching Eleseus an evening prayer; this also is something new. Isak misses her questioning; it was her curiosity and her praise of all he did that made him the contented man, the incomparable man he was. But now, she goes by, saying nothing, or at most with a word or so that he is working himself to death. "She's troubled after that last time, for all she says," thinks Isak to himself.

Oline comes over to visit them once more. If all had been as before she would have been welcome, but now it is different. Inger greets her from the first with some ill-will; be it what it may, there is something that makes Inger look on her as an enemy.

"I'd half a thought I'd be coming just at the right time again," says Oline, with delicate meaning.

"How d'you mean?"

"Why, for the third one to be christened. How is it with you now?"

"Nay," says Inger. "For that matter you might have saved yourself the trouble."

"Ho."

Oline falls to praising the children, so fine and big they've grown; and Isak taking over more ground, and going to build again, by the look of things — there's no end to things with them; a wonderful place, and hard to find its like. "And what is he going to build this time?"

"Ask him yourself," says Inger. "I don't know."

"Nay," says Oline. "'Tis no business of mine. I just looked along to see how things were with you here; it's a pleasure and delight for me to see. As for Goldenhorns, I'll not ask nor speak of her — she's fallen into proper ways, as any one can see."

They talk for a while companionably; Inger is no longer harsh. The clock on the wall strikes with its sweet little note. Oline looks up with tears in her eyes; never in all her humble life did she hear such a thing —'tis like church and organ music, says Oline. Inger feels herself rich and generous-minded towards her poor relation, and says: "Come into the next room and see my loom."

Oline stays all day. She talks to Isak, and praises all his doings. "And I hear you've bought up the land for miles on every side. Couldn't you have got it for nothing, then? There's none as I can see would take it from you."

Isak had been feeling the need of praise, and is the better for it now. Feels a man again. "I'm buying from the Government," says Isak.

"Ay, Government. But they've no call to be grasping in a deal, surely? What are you building now?"

"Why, I don't know. Nothing much, anyway."

"Ay, you're getting on; building and getting on you are. Painted doors to the house, and a clock on the wall —'tis a new grand house you're building, I suspect."

"You, with your foolish talk . . ." says Isak. But he is pleased all the same, and says to Inger: "Couldn't you make a bit of a dish of nice cream custard for one that comes a-visiting?"

"That I can't," says Inger, "for I've churned all there was."

"'Tis no foolish talk," puts in Oline hurriedly; "I'm but a simple woman asking to know. And if it's not a new grand house, why, 'twill be a new big barn, I dare say; and why not? With all these fields and meadow lands, fine and full of growth; ay, and full of milk and honey, as the Bible says."

Isak asks: "How's things looking your way — crops and the like?"

"Why, 'tis there as it is till now. If only the Lord don't set fire to it all again this year, and burn up the lot — Heaven forgive me I should say the word. 'Tis all in His hand and almighty power. But we've nothing our parts that's any way like this place of yours to compare, and that's the solemn truth."

Inger asks after other relatives, her Uncle Sivert in particular. He is the great man of the family, and owns rich fisheries; 'tis almost a wonder how he can find a way to spend all he has. The women talk of Uncle Sivert, and Isak and his doings somehow drop out of sight; no one asks any more about his building now, so at last he says:

"Well, if you want to know, 'tis a bit of a barn with a threshing-floor I'm trying to get set up."

"Just as I thought," says Oline. "Folk with real

sound sense in their heads, they do that way. Forethought and back-thought and all as it should be. There's not a pot nor pitcher in the place you haven't thought of. A threshing-floor, you said?"

Isak is a child. Oline's flattering words go to his head, and he answers something foolishly with fine words: "As to that new house of mine, there must be a threshing-floor in the same, necessarily. 'Tis my intention so."

"A threshing-floor?" says Oline, wagging her head.

"And where's the sense of growing corn on the place if we've nowhere to thresh it?"

"Ay, 'tis as I say, not a thing as could be but you have it all there in your head."

Inger is suddenly out of humour again. The talk between the other two somehow displeases her, and she breaks in:

"Cream custard indeed! And where's the cream to come from? Fish it up in the river, maybe?"

Oline hastens to make peace. "Inger, Lord bless you, child, don't speak of such a thing. Not a word of cream nor custard either — an old creature like me that does but idle about from house to neighbour . . . !"

Isak sits for a while, then up, and saying suddenly: "Here am I doing nothing middle of the day, and stones to fetch and carry for that wall of mine!"

"Ay, a wall like that'll need a mighty lot of stone, to be sure."

"Stone?" says Isak. "'Tis like as if there'd never be enough."

When Isak is gone, the two womenfolk get on nicely together for a while; they sit for hours talking of this and that. In the evening, Oline must go out and see how their live stock has grown: cows, a bull, two calves, and a swarm of sheep and goats. "I don't know where it'll ever end," says Oline, with her eyes turned heavenwards.

And Oline stays the night.

Next morning she goes off again. Once more she has a bundle of something with her. Isak is working in the quarry, and she goes another way round, so that he shall not see.

Two hours later, Oline comes back again, steps into the house, and asks at once: "Where is Isak?"

Inger is washing up. Oline should have passed by the quarry where Isak was at work, and the children with him; Inger at once guesses something wrong.

"Isak? What d'you want with him?"

"Want with him? — why, nothing. Only I didn't see him to say good-bye."

Silence. Oline sits down on a bench without being asked, drops down as if her legs refuse to carry her. Her manner is intended to show that something serious is the matter; she is overcome.

Inger can control herself no longer. Her face is all terror and fury as she says:

"I saw what you sent me by Os-Anders. Ay, 'twas a nice thing to send!"

"Why . . . what . . . ?"

"That hare."

"What do you mean?" asks Oline in a strangely gentle voice.

"Ah, don't deny it!" cries Inger, her eyes wild. "I'll break your face in with this ladle here — see that!"

Struck her? Ay, she did so. Oline took the first blow without falling, and only cried out: "Mind what you're doing, woman! I know what I know about you and your doings!" Inger strikes again, gets Oline down to the floor, falls on her there, and thrusts her knees into her.

"D'you mean to murder me?" asks Oline. The terrible woman with the hare-lip was kneeling on her, a great strong creature armed with a huge wooden ladle, heavy as a club. Oline was bruised already, and bleeding, but still sullenly refusing to cry out. "So you're trying to murder me *too!*"

"Ay, kill you," says Inger, striking again. "There! I'll see you dead before I've done with you." She was certain of it now. Oline knew her secret; nothing mattered now. "I'll spoil your beastly face."

"Beastly face?" gasps Oline. "Huh! Look to your own. With the Lord His mark on it!"

Oline is hard, and will not give in; Inger is forced to give over the blows that are exhausting her own

strength. But she threatens still — glares into the other's eyes and swears she has not finished with her yet. "There's more to come, ay, more, more. Wait till I get a knife. I'll show you!"

She gets on her feet again, and moves as if to look for a knife, a table knife. But now her fury is past its worst, and she falls back on curses and abuse. Oline heaves herself up to the bench again, her face all blue and yellow, swollen and bleeding; she wipes the hair from her forehead, straightens her kerchief, and spits; her mouth too is bruised and swollen. "You devil!" she says.

"You've been nosing about in the woods!" cries Inger. "That's what you've been doing. You've found that little bit of a grave there. Better if you'd dug one for yourself the same time."

"Ay, you wait," says Oline, her eyes glowing revengefully. "I'll say no more — but you wait — there'll be no fine two-roomed house for you, with musical clocks and all."

"You can't take it from me, anyway!"

"Ay, you wait. You'll see what Oline can do."

And so they keep on. Oline does not curse, and hardly raises her voice; there is something almost gentle in her cold cruelty, but she is bitterly dangerous. "Where's that bundle? I left it in the woods. But you shall have it back — I'll not own your wool."

"Ho, you think I've stolen it, maybe."

"Ah, you know best what you've done."

So back and forth again about the wool. Inger

offers to show the very sheep it was cut from. Oline asks quietly, smoothly: "Ay, but who knows where you got the first sheep to start with?"

Inger names the place and people where her first sheep were out to keep with their lambs. "And you mind and care and look to what you're saying," says she threateningly. "Guard your mouth, or you'll be sorry."

"Ha ha ha!" laughs Oline softly. Oline is never at a loss, never to be silenced. "My mouth, eh? And what of your own, my dear?" She points to Inger's hare-lip, calling her a ghastly sight for God and man.

Inger answers furiously, and Oline being fat, she calls her a lump of blubber —"a lump of dog's blubber like you. You sent me a hare — I'll pay you for that."

"Hare again?" says Oline. "If I'd no more guilt in anything than I have about that hare. What was it like?"

"What was it like? Why, what's a hare always like?"

"Like you. The very image."

"Out with you — get out!" shrieks Inger. "'Twas you sent Os-Anders with that hare. I'll have you punished; I'll have you put in prison for that."

"Prison — was it prison you said?"

"Oh, you're jealous and envious of all you see; you hate me for all the good things I've got," says Inger again. "You've lain awake with envy since

I got Isak and all that's here. Heavens, woman, what have I ever done to you? Is it my fault that your children never got on in the world, and turned out badly, every one of them? You can't bear the sight of mine, because they're fine and strong, and better named than yours. Is it my fault they're prettier flesh and blood than yours ever were?"

If there was one thing could drive Oline to fury it was this. She had been a mother many times, and all she had was her children, such as they were; she made much of them, and boasted of them, told of great things they had never really done, and hid their faults.

"What's that you're saying?" answered Oline. "Oh that you don't sink in your grave for shame! My children! They were a bright host of angels compared with yours. You dare to speak of my children? Seven blessed gifts of God they were from they were little, and all grown up now every one. You dare to speak. . . ."

"What about Lise, that was sent to prison?" asks Inger.

"For never a thing. She was as innocent as a flower," answers Oline. "And she's in Bergen now; lives in a town and wears a hat — but what about you?"

"What about Nils — what did they say of him?"

"Oh, I'll not lower myself. . . . But there's one of yours now lying buried out there in the woods — what did you do to it, eh?"

"Now . . . ! One-two-three — out you go!"

shrieks Inger again, and makes a rush at Oline.

But Oline does not move, does not even rise to her feet. Her stolid indifference paralyses Inger, who draws back, muttering: "Wait till I get that knife."

"Don't trouble," says Oline. "I'm going. But as for you, turning your own kin out of doors one-two-three. . . . Nay, I'll say no more."

"Get out of this, that's all you need to do!"

But Oline is not gone yet. The two of them fall to again with words and abuse, a long bout of it again, and when the clock strikes half of the hour, Oline laughs scornfully, making Inger wilder than ever. At last both calm down a little, and Oline makes ready to go. "I've a long road before me," says she, "and it's late enough to be starting. It wouldn't ha' been amiss to have had a bite with me on the way. . . ."

Inger makes no answer. She has come to her senses again now, and pours out water in a basin for Oline to wash. "There — if you want to tidy yourself," she says. Oline too thinks it as well to make herself as decent as may be, but cannot see where the blood is, and washes the wrong places. Inger looks on for a while, and then points with her finger.

"There — wash there too, over your eye. No, not that, the other one; can't you see where I'm pointing?"

"How can I see which one you're pointing at," answers Oline.

" And there's more there, by your mouth. Are you afraid of water? — it won't bite you! "

In the end, Inger washes the patient herself, and throws her a towel.

" What I was going to say," says Oline, wiping herself, and quite peaceable now. " About Isak and the children — how will they get over this? "

" Does he know? " asks Inger.

" Know? He came and saw it."

" What did he say? "

" What could he say? He was speechless, same as me."

Silence.

" It's all your fault," wails Inger, beginning to cry.

" My fault? I wish I may never have more to answer for! "

" I'll ask Os-Anders, anyhow, be sure of that."

" Ay, do."

They talk it all over quietly, and Oline seems less revengeful now. An able politician, is Oline, and quick to find expedients; she speaks now as if in sympathy — what a terrible thing it will be for Isak and the children when it is found out!

" Yes," says Inger, crying again. " I've thought and thought of that night and day." Oline thinks she might be able to help, and be a saviour to them in distress. She could come and stay on the place to look after things, while Inger is in prison.

Inger stops crying; stops suddenly as if to listen

and take thought. "No, you don't care for the children."

"Don't care for them, don't I? How could you say such a thing?"

"Ah, I know. . . ."

"Why, if there's one thing in the world I do feel and care for, 'tis children."

"Ay, for your own," says Inger. "But how would you be with mine? And when I think how you sent that hare for nothing else but to ruin me altogether — oh, you're no better than a heap of wickedness!"

"Am I?" says Oline. "Is it me you mean?"

"Yes, 'tis you I mean," says Inger, crying; "you've been a wicked wretch, you have, and I'll not trust you. And you'd steal all the wool, too, if you did come. And all the cheeses that'd go to your people instead of mine. . . ."

"Oh, you wicked creature to think of such a thing!" answers Oline.

Inger cries, and wipes her eyes, saying a word or so between. Oline does not try to force her. If Inger does not care about the idea, 'tis all the same to her. She can go and stay with her son Nils, as she has always done. But now that Inger is to be sent away to prison, it will be a hard time for Isak and the innocent children; Oline could stay on the place and give an eye to things. "You can think it over," says Oline.

Inger has lost the day. She cries and shakes her

head and looks down. She goes out as if walking in her sleep, and makes up a parcel of food for Oline to take with her. "'Tis more than's worth your while," says Oline.

"You can't go all that way without a bite to eat," says Inger.

When Oline has gone, Inger steals out, looks round, and listens. No, no sound from the quarry. She goes nearer, and hears the children playing with little stones. Isak is sitting down, holding the crowbar between his knees, and resting on it like a staff. There he sits.

Inger steals away into the edge of the wood. There was a spot where she had set a little cross in the ground; the cross is thrown down now, and where it stood the turf has been lifted, and the ground turned over. She stoops down and pats the earth together again with her hands. And there she sits.

She had come out of curiosity, to see how far the little grave had been disturbed by Oline; she stays there now because the cattle have not yet come in for the night. Sits there crying, shaking her head, and looking down.

Chapter VII

AND the days pass.

A blessed time for the soil, with sun and showers of rain; the crops are looking well. The haymaking is nearly over now, and they have got in a grand lot of hay; almost more than they can find room for. Some is stowed away under overhanging rocks, in the stable, under the flooring of the house itself; the shed at the side is emptied of everything to make room for more hay. Inger herself works early and late, a faithful helper and support. Isak takes advantage of every fall of rain to put in a spell of roofing on the new barn, and get the south wall at least fully done; once that is ready, they can stuff in as much hay as they please. The work is going forward; they will manage, never fear!

And their great sorrow and disaster — ay, it was there, the thing was done, and what it brought must come. Good things mostly leave no trace, but something always comes of evil. Isak took the matter sensibly from the first. He made no great words about it, but asked his wife simply: "How did you come to do it?" Inger made no answer to that. And a little after, he spoke again: "Strangled it — was that what you did?"

"Yes," said Inger.

"You shouldn't have done that."

"No," she agreed.

"And I can't make out how you ever could bring yourself to do it."

"She was all the same as myself," said Inger.

"How d'you mean?"

"Her mouth."

Isak thought over that for some time. "Ay, well," said he.

And nothing more was said about it at the time; the days went on, peacefully as ever; there was all the mass of hay to be got in, and a rare heavy crop all round, so that by degrees the thing slipped into the background of their minds. But it hung over them, and over the place, none the less. They could not hope that Oline would keep the secret; it was too much to expect. And even if Oline said nothing, others would speak; dumb witnesses would find a tongue; the walls of the house, the trees around the little grave in the wood. Os-Anders the Lapp would throw out hints; Inger herself would betray it, sleeping or waking. They were prepared for the worst.

Isak took the matter sensibly — what else was there to do? He knew now why Inger had always taken care to be left alone at every birth; to be alone with her fears of how the child might be, and face the danger with no one by. Three times she had done the same thing. Isak shook his head, touched with pity for her ill fate — poor Inger. He learned of the coming of the Lapp with the hare, and acquitted her. It led to a great love between

them, a wild love; they drew closer to each other in their peril. Inger was full of a desperate sweetness towards him, and the great heavy fellow, lumbering carrier of burdens, felt a greed and an endless desire for her in himself. And Inger, for all that she wore hide shoes like a Lapp, was no withered little creature as the Lapland women are, but splendidly big. It was summer now, and she went about barefooted, with her naked legs showing almost to the knee — Isak could not keep his eyes from those bare legs.

All through the summer she went about singing bits of hymns, and she taught Eleseus to say prayers; but there grew up in her an unchristian hate of all Lapps, and she spoke plainly enough to any that passed. Some one might have sent them again; like as not they had a hare in their bag as before; let them go on their way, and no more about it.

"A hare? What hare?"

"Ho, you haven't heard perhaps what Os-Anders he did that time?"

"No."

"Well, I don't care who knows it — he came up here with a hare, when I was with child."

"Dear, and that was a dreadful thing! And what happened?"

"Never you mind what happened, just get along with you, that's all. Here's a bite of food, and get along."

"You don't happen to have an odd bit of leather anywhere, I could mend my shoe with?"

"No! But I'll give you a bit of stick if you don't get out!"

Now a Lapp will beg as humbly as could be, but say no to him, and he turns bad, and threatens. A pair of Lapps with two children came past the place; the children were sent up to the house to beg, and came back and said there was no one to be seen about the place. The four of them stood there a while talking in their own tongue, then the man went up to see. He went inside, and stayed. Then his wife went up, and the children after; all of them stood inside the doorway, talking Lapp. The man puts his head in the doorway and peeps through into the room; no one there either. The clock strikes the hour, and the whole family stand listening in wonder.

Inger must have had some idea there were strangers about; she comes hurrying down the hillside, and seeing Lapps, strange Lapps into the bargain, asks them straight out what they are doing there. "What do you want in here? Couldn't you see there was no one at home?"

"H'm . . ." says the man.

"Get out with you," says Inger again, "and go on your way."

The Lapps move out slowly, unwillingly. "We were just listening to that clock of yours," says the man; "'tis a wonder to hear, that it is."

"You haven't a bit of bread to spare?" says his wife.

"Where do you come from?" asks Inger.

"From the water over beyond. We've been walking all night."

"And where are you going to now?"

"Across the hills."

Inger makes up some food for them; when she comes out with it, the woman starts begging again: a bit of stuff for a cap, a tuft of wool, a stump of cheese — anything. Inger has no time to waste, Isak and the children are in the hayfield. "Be off with you now," she says.

The woman tries flattery. "We saw your place up here, and the cattle — a host of them, like the stars in the sky."

"Ay, a wonder," says the man. "You haven't a pair of old shoes to give away to needy folk?"

Inger shuts the door of the house and goes back to her work on the hillside. The man called after her — she pretended not to hear, and walked on unheeding. But she heard it well enough: "You don't want to buy any hares, maybe?"

There was no mistaking what he had said. The Lapp himself might have spoken innocently enough; some one had told him, perhaps. Or he might have meant it ill. Be that as it may, Inger took it as a warning — a message of what was to come. . . .

The days went on. The settlers were healthy folk; what was to come would come; they went about their work and waited. They lived close to each other like beasts of the forest; they slept and ate; already the year was so far advanced that they had tried the new potatoes, and found them large and

floury. The blow that was to fall — why did it not come? It was late in August already, soon it would be September; were they to be spared through the winter? They lived in a constant watchfulness; every night they crept close together in their cave, thankful that the day had passed without event. And so the time went on until one day in October, when the Lensmand came up with a man and a bag. The Law stepped in through their doorway.

The investigation took some time. Inger was called up and examined privately; she denied nothing. The grave in the wood was opened, and its contents removed, the body being sent for examination. The little body — it was dressed in Eleseus' christening robe, and a cap sewn over with beads.

Isak seemed to find speech again. "Ay," said he, "it's as bad as well can be with us now. I've said before — you ought never to have done it."

"No," said Inger.

"How did you do it?"

Inger made no answer.

"That you could find it in your heart. . . ."

"She was just the same as myself to look at. And so I took and twisted her face round."

Isak shook his head slowly.

"And then she was dead," went on Inger, beginning to cry.

Isak was silent for a while. "Well, well, 'tis too late to be crying over it now," said he.

"She had brown hair," sobbed Inger, "there at the back of her head. . . ."

And again no more was said.

Time went on as before. Inger was not locked up; the law was merciful. Lensmand Heyerdahl asked her questions just as he might have spoken to any one, and only said, " It's a great pity such things should happen at all." Inger asked who had informed against her, but the Lensmand answered that it was no one in particular; many had spoken of the matter, and he had heard of it from several quarters. Had she not herself said something about it to some Lapps?

Inger — ay, she had told some Lapps about Os-Anders, how he came and brought a hare that summer, and gave her unborn child the hare-lip. And wasn't it Oline who had sent the hare? — The Lensmand knew nothing about that. But in any case, he could not think of putting down such ignorant superstition in his report.

" But my mother saw a hare just before I was born," said Inger. . . .

The barn was finished; a great big place it was, with hay-stalls on both sides and a threshing-floor in the middle. The shed and the other makeshift places were emptied now, and all the hay brought into the barn; the corn was reaped, dried in stacks, and carted in. Inger took up the carrots and turnips. All their crops were in now. And everything might have been well with them — they had all they needed. Isak had started on new ground again, before the frost came, to make a bigger cornfield; Isak was a tiller of the soil. But in November Inger said

one day, " She would have been six months old now, and known us all."

" 'Tis no good talking of that now," said Isak.

When the winter came, Isak threshed his corn on the new threshing-floor, and Inger helped him often, with an arm as quick to the work as his own, while the children played in the haystalls at the side. It was fine plump grain. Early in the new year the roads were good, and Isak started carting down his loads of wood to the village; he had his regular customers now, and the summer-dried wood fetched a good price. One day he and Inger agreed that they should take the fine bull-calf from Goldenhorns and drive it down to Fru Geissler, with a cheese into the bargain. She was delighted, and asked how much it cost.

" Nothing," said Isak. " The Lensmand paid for it before."

" Heaven bless him, and did he? " said Fru Geissler, touched at the thought. She sent things up for Eleseus and Sivert in return — cakes and picture-books and toys. When Isak came back and Inger saw the things, she turned away and cried.

" What is it? " asked Isak.

" Nothing," answered Inger. " Only — she'd have been just a year now, and able to see it all."

" Ay, but you know how it was with her," said Isak, for comfort's sake. " And after all, it may be we'll get off easier than we thought. I've found out where Geissler is now."

Inger looked up. "But how's that going to help us?"

"I don't know. . . ."

Then Isak carried his corn to the mill and had it ground, and brought back flour. Then he turned woodman again, cutting the wood to be ready for next winter. His life was spent in this work and that, according to the season; from the fields to the woods, and back to the fields again. He had worked on the place for six years now, and Inger five; all might have been well, if it were only allowed to last. But it was not. Inger worked at her loom and tended the animals; also, she was often to be heard singing hymns, but it was a pitiful singing; she was like a bell without a tongue.

As soon as the roads were passable, she was sent for down to the village to be examined. Isak had to stay behind. And being there all alone, it came into his mind to go across to Sweden and find out Geissler; the former Lensmand had been kind to them, and might perhaps still lend a helping hand some way to the folks at Sellanraa. But when Inger returned, she had asked about things herself, and learned something of what her sentence was likely to be. Strictly speaking, it was imprisonment for life, Paragraph 1. But . . . After all, she had stood up in the court itself and simply confessed. The two witnesses from the village had looked pityingly at her, and the judge had put his questions kindly; but for all that, she was no match for the bright intellects

of the law. Lawyers are great men to simple folk; they can quote paragraph this and section that; they have learned such things by rote, ready to bring out at any moment. Oh, they are great men indeed. And apart from all this knowledge, they are not always devoid of sense; sometimes even not altogether heartless. Inger had no cause to complain of the court; she made no mention of the hare, but when she tearfully explained that she could not be so cruel to her poor deformed child as to let it live, the magistrate nodded, quietly and seriously.

"But," said he, "think of yourself; you have a hare-lip, and it has not spoilt your life."

"No, thanks be to God," was all she said. She could not tell them of all she had suffered in secret as a child, as a young girl.

But the magistrate must have understood something of what it meant; he himself had a club-foot, and could not dance. "As to the sentence," he said, "I hardly know. Really, it should be imprisonment for life, but . . . I can't say, perhaps we might get it commuted, second or third degree, fifteen to twelve years, or twelve to nine. There's a commission sitting to reform the criminal code, make it more humane, but the final decision won't be ready yet. Anyhow, we must hope for the best," said he.

Inger came back in a state of dull resignation; they had not found it necessary to keep her in confinement meantime. Two months passed; then one evening, when Isak came back from fishing, the Lensmand and his new assistant had been to Sellanraa.

Inger was cheerful, and welcomed her husband kindly, praising his catch, though it was little he had brought home.

"What I was going to say — has any one been here?" he asked.

"Any one been? Why, who should there be?"

"There's fresh footmarks outside. Men with boots on."

"Why — there's been no one but the Lensmand and one other."

"What did they want?"

"You know that without asking."

"Did they come to fetch you?"

"Fetch me? No, 'twas only about the sentence. The Lord is kind, 'tis not so bad as I feared."

"Ah," said Isak eagerly. "Not so long, maybe?"

"No. Only a few years."

"How many years?"

"Why, you might think it a lot, maybe. But I'm thankful to God all the same."

Inger did not say how long it would be. Later that evening Isak asked when they would be coming to fetch her away, but this she could not or would not tell. She had grown thoughtful again, and talked of what was to come; how they would manage she could not think — but she supposed they would have to get Oline to come. And Isak had no better plan to offer.

What had become of Oline, by the way? She had not been up this year as she used to do. Was she

going to stay away for ever, now that she had upset everything for them? The working season passed, but Oline did not come — did she expect them to go and fetch her? She would come loitering up of herself, no doubt, the great lump of blubber, the monster.

And at last one day she did. Extraordinary person — it was as nothing whatever had occurred to make ill-feeling between them; she was even knitting a pair of new stockings for Eleseus, she said.

"Just came up to see how you were getting on over here," said she. And it turned out that she had brought her clothes and things up in a sack, and left in the woods close by, ready to stay.

That evening Inger took her husband aside and said: "Didn't you say something about seeking out Geissler? 'Tis in the slack time now."

"Ay," said Isak. "Now that Oline is come, I can go off tomorrow morning, first thing."

Inger was grateful, and thanked him. "And take your money with you," she said —"all you have in the place."

"Why, can't you keep the money here?"

"No," said she.

Inger made up a big parcel of food at once, and Isak woke while it was yet night, and got ready to start. Inger went out on the door-slab to see him off; she did not cry or complain, but only said:

"They may be coming for me now any day."

"You don't know when?"

"No, I can't say. And I don't suppose it will be

just yet, but anyhow. . . . If only you could get hold of Geissler, perhaps he might be able to say something."

What could Geissler do to help them now? Nothing. But Isak went.

Inger — oh, she knew, no doubt, more than she had been willing to say. It might be, too, that she herself had sent for Oline. When Isak came from Sweden, Inger was gone and Oline was there with the two children.

It was dark news for a homecoming. Isak's voice was louder than usual as he asked: "Is she gone?"

"Ay," said Oline.

"What day was it?"

"The day after you left." And Isak knew now that Inger had got him out of the way on purpose — that was why she had persuaded him to take the money with him. Oh, but she might have kept a little for herself, for that long journey!

But the children could think of nothing else but the little pig Isak had brought with him. It was all he had for his trouble; the address he had was out of date, and Geissler was no longer in Sweden, but had returned to Norway and was now in Trondhjem. As for the pig, Isak had carried it in his arms all the way, feeding it with milk from a bottle, and sleeping with it on his breast among the hills. He had been looking forward to Inger's delight when she saw it; now, Eleseus and Sivert played with it, and it was a joy to them. And Isak, watching them, forgot his trouble for the moment. Moreover, Oline had a

message from the Lensmand; the State had at last given its decision in the matter of the land at Sellanraa. Isak had only to go down to the office and pay the amount. This was good news, and served to keep him from the worst depth of despair. Tired and worn out as he was, he packed up some food in a bag and set off for the village at once. Maybe he had some little hope of seeing Inger once again before she left there.

But he was disappointed. Inger was gone — for eight years. Isak felt himself in a mist of darkness and emptiness; heard only a word here and there of all the Lensmand said — a pity such things should happen . . . hoped it might be a lesson to her . . . reform and be a better woman after, and not kill her children any more!

Lensmand Heyerdahl had married the year before. His wife had no intention of ever being a mother — no children for her, thank you! And she had none.

"And now," said the Lensmand, "this business about Sellanraa. At last I am in a position to settle it definitely. The Department is graciously pleased to approve the sale of the land, more or less according to the terms I suggested."

"H'm," said Isak.

"It has been a lengthy business, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that my endeavours have not been altogether fruitless. The terms I proposed have been agreed to almost without exception."

"Without exception," said Isak, and nodded.

"Here are the title-deeds. You can have the transfer registered at the first session."

"Ay," said Isak. "And how much is there to pay?"

"Ten *Daler* a year. "The Department has made a slight alteration here — ten *Daler* per annum instead of five. You have no objection to that, I presume?"

"As long as I can manage to pay . . ." said Isak.

"And for ten years." Isak looked up, half frightened.

"Those are the terms — the Department insists. Even then, it's no price really for all that land, cleared and cultivated as it is now."

Isak had the ten *Daler* for that year — it was the money he had got for his loads of wood, and for the cheeses Inger had laid by. He paid the amount, and had still a small sum left.

"It's a lucky thing for you the Department didn't get to hear about your wife," said the Lensmand. "Or they might have sold to some one else."

"Ay," said Isak. He asked about Inger. "Is it true that she's gone away for eight years?"

"That is so. And can't be altered — the law must take its course. As a matter of fact, the sentence is extraordinarily light. There's one thing you must do now — that is, to set up clear boundaries between your land and the State's. A straight, direct line, following the marks I set up on the spot,

and entered in my register at the time. The timber cleared from the boundary line becomes your property. I will come up some time and have a look at what you have done."

Isak trudged back to his home.

Chapter VIII

TIME flies? Ay, when a man is growing old. Isak was not old, he had not lost his vigour; the years seemed long to him. He worked on his land, and let his iron beard grow as it would.

Now and again the monotony of the wilderness was broken by the sight of a passing Lapp, or by something happening to one of the animals on the place, then all would be as before. Once there came a number of men at once; they rested at Sellanraa, and had some food and a dish of milk; they asked Isak and Oline about the path across the hills; they were marking out the telegraph line, they said. And once came Geissler — Geissler himself, and no other. There he came, free and easy as ever, walking up from the village, two men with him, carrying mining tools, pick and spade.

Oh, that Geissler! Unchanged, the same as ever; meeting and greeting as if nothing had happened, talked to the children, went into the house and came out again, looked over the ground, opened the doors of cowshed and hayloft and looked in. "Excellent!" said he. "Isak, have you still got those bits of stone?"

"Bits of stone?" said Isak, wondering.

" Little heavy lumps of stone I saw the boy playing with when I was here once before."

The stones were out in the larder, serving as weights for so many mouse-traps; Isak brought them in. Geissler and the two men examined them, talking together, tapped them here and there, weighed them in the hand. " Copper," they said.

" Could you go up with us and show where you found them? " asked Geissler.

They all went up together; it was not far to the place where Isak had found the stones, but they stayed up in the hills for a couple of days, looking for veins of metal, and firing charges here and there. They came down to Sellanraa with two bags filled with heavy lumps of stone.

Isak had meanwhile had a talk with Geissler, and told him everything as to his own position: about the purchase of the land, which had come to a hundred *Daler* instead of fifty.

" That's a trifle," said Geissler easily. " You've thousands, like as not, on your part of the hills."

" Ho! " said Isak.

" But you'd better get those title-deeds entered in the register as soon as ever you can."

" Ay."

" Then the State can't come any nonsense about it after, you understand."

Isak understood. " 'Tis worst about Inger," he said.

" Ay," said Geissler, and remained thoughtful

longer than was usual with him. "Might get the case brought up again. Set out the whole thing properly; very likely get the sentence reduced a bit. Or we could put in an application for a pardon, and that would probably come to the same thing in the end."

"Why, if as that could be done. . . ."

"But it wouldn't do to try for a pardon at once. Have to wait a bit. What was I going to say . . . you've been taking things down to my wife — meat and cheese and things — what?"

"Why, as to that, Lensmand paid for all that before."

"Did I, though?"

"And helped us kindly in many a way."

"Not a bit of it," said Geissler shortly. "Here — take this." And he took out some *Daler* notes.

Geissler was not the man to take things for nothing, that was plain. And he seemed to have plenty of money about him, from the way his pocket bulged. Heaven only knew if he really had money or not.

"But she writes all's well and getting on," said Isak, coming back to his one thought.

"What? — Oh, your wife!"

"Ay. And since the girl was born — she's had a girl child, born while she was there. A fine little one."

"Excellent!"

"Ay, and now they're all as kind as can be, and help her every way, she says."

"Look here," said Geissler, "I'm going to send these bits of stone in to some mining experts, and find out what's in them. If there's a decent percentage of copper, you'll be a rich man."

"H'm," said Isak. "And how long do you think before we could apply for a pardon?"

"Well, not so very long, perhaps. I'll write the thing for you. I'll be back here again soon. What was it you said — your wife has had a child since she left here?"

"Yes."

"Then they took her away while she was expecting it. That's a thing they've no right to do."

"Ho!"

"Anyhow, it's one more reason for letting her out earlier."

"Ay, if that could be . . ." said Isak gratefully.

Isak knew nothing of the many lengthy writings backward and forward between the different authorities concerning the woman who was expecting a child. The local authorities had let her go free while the matter was pending, for two reasons: in the first place, they had no lock-up in the village where they could keep her, and, in the second place, they wished to be as lenient as possible. The consequence was something they could not have foreseen. Later, when they had sent to fetch her away, no one had inquired about her condition, and she herself had said nothing of it. Possibly she had concealed the matter on purpose, in order to have a child with her during the years of imprisonment; if

she behaved well, she would no doubt be allowed to see it now and again. Or perhaps she had been merely indifferent, and had gone off carelessly, despite her state. . . .

Isak worked and toiled, dug ditches and broke new ground, set up his boundary lines between his land and the State's, and gained another season's stock of timber. But now that Inger was no longer there to wonder at his doings, he worked more from habit than for any joy in what he did. And he had let two sessions pass without having his title-deeds registered, caring little about it; at last, that autumn, he had pulled himself together and got it done. Things were not as they should be with Isak now. Quiet and patient as ever — yes, but now it was because he did not care. He got out hides because it had to be done — goatskins and calfskins — steeped them in the river, laid them in bark, and tanned them after a fashion ready for shoes. In the winter — at the very first threshing — he set aside his seed corn for the next spring, in order to have it done; best to have things done and done with; he was a methodical man. But it was a grey and lonely life; eyah, *Herregud!* a man without a wife again, and all the rest. . . .

What pleasure was there now in sitting at home Sundays, cleanly washed, with a neat red shirt on, when there was no one to be clean and neat for! Sundays were the longest days of all, days when he was forced to idleness and weary thoughts; nothing to do but wander about over the place, counting up

all that should have been done. He always took the children with him, always carried one on his arm. It was a distraction to hear their chatter, and answer their questions of everything.

He kept old Oline because there was no one else he could get. And Oline was, after all, of use in a way. Carding and spinning, knitting stockings and mittens, and making cheese — she could do all these things, but she lacked Inger's happy touch, and had no heart in her work; nothing of all she handled was her own. There was a thing Isak had bought once at the village store, a china pot with a dog's head on the lid. It was a sort of tobacco box, really, and stood on a shelf. Oline took off the lid and dropped it on the floor. Inger had left behind some cuttings of fuchsia, under glass. Oline took the glass off and, putting it back, pressed it down hard and maliciously; next day, all the cuttings were dead. It was not so easy for Isak to bear with such things; he looked displeased, and showed it, and, as there was nothing swanlike and gentle about Isak, it may well be that he showed it plainly. Oline cared little for looks; soft-spoken as ever, she only said: "Now, could I help it?"

"That I can't say," answered Isak. "But you might have left the things alone."

"I'll not touch her flowers again," said Oline. But the flowers were already dead.

Again, how could it be that the Lapps came up to Sellanraa so frequently of late? Os-Anders, for instance, had no business there at all, he should have

passed on his way. Twice in one summer he came across the hills, and Os-Anders, it should be remembered, had no reindeer to look to, but lived by begging and quartering himself on other Lapps. As soon as he came up to the place, Oline left her work and fell to chatting with him about people in the village, and, when he left, his sack was heavy with no end of things. Isak put up with it for two years, saying nothing.

Then Oline wanted new shoes again, and he could be silent no longer. It was in the autumn, and Oline wore shoes every day, instead of going in wooden pattens or rough hide.

"Looks like being fine today," said Isak. "H'm." That was how he began.

"Ay," said Oline.

"Those cheeses, Eleseus," went on Isak again, "wasn't it ten you counted on the shelf this morning?"

"Ay," said Eleseus.

"Well, there's but nine there now."

Eleseus counted again, and thought for a moment inside his little head; then he said: "Yes, but then Os-Anders had one to take away; that makes ten."

There was silence for quite a while after that. Then little Sivert must try to count as well, and says after his brother: "That makes ten."

Silence again. At last Oline felt she must say something.

"Ay, I did give him a tiny one, that's true. I didn't think that could do any harm. But they chil-

dren, they're no sooner able to talk than they show what's in them. And who they take after's more than I can think or guess. For 'tis not your way, Isak, that I do know."

The hint was too plain to pass unchecked. "The children are well enough," said Isak shortly. "But I'd like to know what good Os-Anders has ever done to me and mine."

"What good?"

"Ay, that's what I said."

"What good Os-Anders . . . ?"

"Ay, since I'm to give him cheeses in return."

Oline has had time to think, and has her answer ready now.

"Well, now, I wouldn't have thought it of you, Isak, that I wouldn't. Was it me, pray, that first began with Os-Anders? I wish I may never move alive from this spot if I ever so much as spoke his name."

Brilliant success for Oline. Isak has to give in, as he has done many a time before.

But Oline had more to say. "And if you mean I'm to go here clean barefoot, with the winter coming on and all, and never own the like of a pair of shoes, why, you'll please to say so. I said a word of it three and four weeks gone, that I needed shoes, but never sign of a shoe to this day, and here I am."

Said Isak: "What's wrong with your pattens, then, that you can't use them?"

"What's wrong with them?" repeats Oline, all unprepared.

"Ay, that's what I'd like to know."

"With my pattens?"

"Ay."

"Well . . . and me carding and spinning, and tending cattle and sheep and all, looking after children here — have you nothing to say to that? I'd like to know; that wife of yours that's in prison for her deeds, did you let her go barefoot in the snow?"

"She wore her pattens," said Isak. "And for going to church and visiting and the like, why, rough hide was good enough for her."

"Ay, and all the finer for it, no doubt."

"Ay, that she was. And when she did wear her hide shoes in summer, she did but stuff a wisp of grass in them, and never no more. But you — you must wear stockings in your shoes all the year round."

Said Oline: "As for that, I'll wear out my pattens in time, no doubt. I'd no thought there was any such haste to wear out good pattens all at once." She spake softly and gently, but with half-closed eyes, the same sly Oline as ever. "And as for Inger," said she, "the changeling, as we called her, she went about with children of mine and learned both this and that, for years she did. And this is what we get for it. Because I've a daughter that lives in Bergen and wears a hat, I suppose that's what Inger must be gone away south for; gone to Trondhjem to buy a hat, he he!"

Isak got up to leave the room. But Oline had opened her heart now, unlocked the store of black-

ness within; ay, she gave out rays of darkness, did Oline. Thank Heaven, none of her children had their faces slit like a fire-breathing dragon, so to speak; but they were none the worse for that, maybe. No, 'twasn't every one was so quick and handy at getting rid of the young they bore — strangling them in a twinkling. . . .

"Mind what you're saying," shouted Isak. And to make his meaning perfectly clear, he added: "You cursed old hag!"

But Oline was not going to mind what she was saying; not in the least, he he! She turned up her eyes to heaven and hinted that a hare-lip might be this or that, but some folk seemed to carry it too far, he he!

Isak may well have been glad to get safely out of the house at last. And what could he do but get Oline the shoes? A tiller of earth in the wilds; no longer even something of a god, that he could say to his servant, "Go!" He was helpless without Oline; whatever she did or said, she had nothing to fear, and she knew it.

The nights are colder now, with a full moon; the marshlands harden till they can almost bear, but thawing again when the sun comes out, to an impassable swamp once more. Isak goes down to the village one cold night, to order shoes for Oline. He takes a couple of cheeses with him, for Fru Geissler.

Half-way down to the village a new settler has appeared. A well-to-do man, no doubt, since he had called in folk from the village to build his house,

and hired men to plough up a patch of sandy moorland for potatoes; he himself did little or nothing. The new man was Brede Olsen, Lensmand's assistant, a man to go to when the doctor had to be fetched, or a pig to be killed. He was not yet thirty, but had four children to look after, not to speak of his wife, who was as good as a child herself. Oh, Brede was not so well off, perhaps, after all; 'twas no great money he could earn running hither and thither on all odd businesses, and collecting taxes from people that would not pay. So now he was trying a new venture on the soil. He had raised a loan at the bank to start house in the wilds. Breidablik, he called the place; and it was Lensmand Heyerdahl's lady that had found that splendid name.

Isak hurries past the house, not wasting time on looking in, but he can see through the window that all the children are up already, early as it is. Isak has no time to lose, if he is to be back as far as this on the homeward journey next night, while the roads are hard. A man living in the wilds has much to think of, to reckon out and fit in as best can be. It is not the busiest time for him just now, but he is anxious about the children, left all alone with Oline.

He thinks, as he walks, of the first time he had come that way. Time has passed, the two last years had been long; there had been much that was good at Sellanraa, and a deal that was not — eyah, *Heregud!* And now here was another man clearing ground in the wilds. Isak knew the place well; it was one of the kindlier spots he had noted himself

on his way up, but he had gone on farther. It was nearer the village, certainly, but the timber was not so good; the ground was less hilly, but a poorer soil; easy to work on the surface, but hard to deal with farther down. That fellow Brede would find it took more than a mere turning over of the soil to made a field that would bear. And why hadn't he built out a shed from the end of the hay-loft for carts and implements? Isak noticed that a cart had been left standing out in the yard, uncovered, in the open.

He got through his business with the shoemaker, and, Fru Geissler having left the place, he sold his cheeses to the man at the store. In the evening, he starts out for home. The frost is getting harder now, and it is good, firm going, but Isak trudges heavily for all that. Who could say when Geissler would be back, now that his wife had gone; maybe he would not be coming at all? Inger was far away, and time was getting on. . . .

He does not look in at Brede's on the way back; on the contrary, he goes a long way round, keeping away from the place. He does not care to stop and talk to folk, only trudge on. Brede's cart is still out in the open — does he mean to leave it there? Well, 'tis his own affair. Isak himself had a cart of his own now, and a shed to house it, but none the happier for that. His home is but half a thing; it had been a home once, but now only half a thing.

It is full day by the time he gets within sight of his own place up on the hillside, and it cheers him some-

what, weary and exhausted as he is after forty-eight hours on the road. The house and buildings, there they stand, smoke curling up from the chimney; both the little ones are out, and come down to meet him as he appears. He goes into the house, and finds a couple of Lapps sitting down. Oline starts up in surprise: "What, you back already!" She is making coffee on the stove. Coffee? *Coffee!*

Isak has noticed the same thing before. When Os-Anders or any of the other Lapps have been there, Oline makes coffee in Inger's little pot for a long time after. She does it while Isak is out in the woods or in the fields, and when he comes in unexpectedly and sees it, she says nothing. But he knows that he is the poorer by a cheese or a bundle of wool each time. And it is to his credit that he does not pick up Oline in his fingers and crush her to pieces for her meanness. Altogether, Isak is trying hard indeed to make himself a better man, better and better, whatever may be his idea, whether it be for the sake of peace in the house, or in some hope that the Lord may give him back his Inger the sooner. He is something given to superstition and a pondering upon things; even his rustic wariness is innocent in its way. Early that autumn he found the turf on the roof of the stable was beginning to slip down inside. Isak chewed at his beard for a while, then, smiling like a man who understands a jest, he laid some poles across to keep it up. Not a bitter word did he say. And another thing: the shed where he kept his store of provisions was simply

built on high stone feet at the corners, with nothing between. After a while, little birds began to find their way in through the big gaps in the wall, and stayed fluttering about inside, unable to get out. Oline complained that they picked at the food and spoiled the meat, and made a nasty mess about the place. Isak said: "Ay, 'tis a pity small birds should come in and not be able to get out again." And in the thick of a busy season he turned stone-mason and filled up the gaps in the wall.

Heaven knows what was in his mind that he took things so; whether maybe he fancied Inger might be given back to him the sooner for his gentleness.

Chapter IX

THE years pass by.

Once more there came visitors to Sellanraa; an engineer, with a foreman and a couple of workmen, marking out telegraph lines again over the hills. By the route they were taking now, the line would be carried a little above the house, and a straight road cut through the forest. No harm in that. It would make the place less desolate, a glimpse of the world would make it brighter.

"This place," said the engineer, "will be just about midway between two lines through the valleys on either side. They'll very likely ask you to take on the job of linesman for both."

"Ho!" said Isak.

"It will be twenty-five *Daler* a year in your pocket."

"H'm," said Isak. "And what am I to do for that?"

"Keep the line in repair, mend the wires when necessary, clear away forest growth on the route as it comes up. They'll set up a little machine thing in the house here, to hang on the wall, that'll tell you when you're wanted. And when it does, you must leave whatever you're doing and go."

Isak thought it over. "I could do it all right in winter," he said.

"That's no good. It would have to be for the whole year, summer and winter alike."

"Can't be done," said Isak. "Spring and summer and autumn I've my work on the land, and no time for other things."

The engineer looked at him for quite a while, and then put an astonishing question, as follows: "Can you make more money that way?"

"Make more money?" said Isak.

"Can you earn more money in a day by working on the land than you could by working for us?"

"Why, as to that, I can't say," answered Isak. "It's just this way, you see —'tis the land I'm here for. I've many souls and more beasts to keep alive — and 'tis the land that keeps us. 'Tis our living."

"If you won't, I can find some one else," said the engineer.

But Isak only seemed rather relieved at the threat. He did not like to disoblige the great man, and tried to explain. "'Tis this way," he said. "I've a horse and five cows, besides the bull. I've twenty sheep and sixteen goats. The beasts, they give us food and wool and hide; we must give them food."

"Yes, yes, of course," said the other shortly.

"Well, and so I say, how am I to feed them when I've to run away all times in the busy season, to work on the telegraph line?"

"Say no more about it," said the engineer. "I'll get the man down below you, Brede Olsen; he'll be glad to take it." He turned to his men with a brief word: "Now, lads, we'll be getting on."

Now Oline had heard from the way Isak spoke that he was stiff-necked and unreasonable in his mind, and she would make the most of it.

"What was that you said, Isak? Sixteen goats? There's no more than fifteen," said she.

Isak looked at her, and Oline looked at him again, straight in the face.

"Not sixteen goats?" said he.

"No," said she, looking helplessly towards the strangers, as if to say how unreasonable he was.

"Ho!" said Isak softly. He drew a tuft of his beard between his teeth and stood chewing it.

The engineer and his men went on their way.

Now, if Isak had wanted to show his displeasure with Oline and maybe thrash her for her doings, here was his chance — a Heaven-sent chance to do that thing. They were alone in the house; the children had gone after the men when they went. Isak stood there in the middle of the room, and Oline was sitting by the stove. Isak cleared his throat once or twice, just to show that he was ready to say something if he pleased. But he said nothing. That was his strength of soul. What, did he not know the number of his goats as he knew the fingers on his hands — was the woman mad? Could one of the beasts be missing, when he knew every one of them personally and talked to them every day — his goats that were sixteen in number? Oline must have traded away one of them the day before, when the woman from Breidablik had come up to look at the place. "H'm," said Isak, and this time words were

on the very tip of his tongue. What was it Oline had done? Not exactly murder, perhaps, but something not far from it. He could speak in deadly earnest of that sixteenth goat.

But he could not stand there for ever, in the middle of the room, saying nothing. "H'm," he said. "Ho! So there's but fifteen goats there now, you say?"

"That's all I make it," answered Oline gently. "But you'd better count for yourself and see."

Now was his time — he could do it now: reach out with his hands and alter the shape of Oline considerably, with but one good grip. He could do it. He did not do it, but said boldly, making for the door: "I'll say no more just now." And he went out, as if plainly showing that, next time, he would have proper words to say, never fear.

"Eleseus!" he called out.

Where was Eleseus, where were the children? Their father had something to ask them; they were big fellows now, with their eyes about them. He found them under the floor of the barn; they had crept in as far as they could, hiding away invisibly, but betraying themselves by an anxious whispering. Out they crept now like two sinners.

The fact of the matter was that Eleseus had found a stump of coloured pencil the engineer had left behind, and started to run after him and give it back, but the big men with their long strides were already far up in the forest. Eleseus stopped. The idea occurred to him that he might keep the pencil — if

only he could! He hunted out little Sivert, so that they might at least be two to share the guilt, and the pair of them had crept in under the floor with their find. Oh, that stump of pencil — it was an event in their lives, a wonder! They found shavings and covered them all over with signs; the pencil, they discovered, made blue marks with one end and red with the other, and they took it in turns to use. When their father called out so loudly and insistenly, Eleseus whispered: "They've come back for the pencil!" All their joy was dashed in a moment, swept out of their minds at a touch, and their little hearts began beating and thumping terribly. The brothers crept forth. Eleseus held out the pencil at arm's length; here it was, they had not broken it; only wished they had never seen the thing.

No engineer was to be seen. Their hearts settled to a quieter beat; it was heavenly to be rid of that dreadful tension.

"There was a woman here yesterday," said their father.

"Yes."

"The woman from the place down below. Did you see her go?"

"Yes."

"Had she a goat with her?"

"No," said the boys. "A goat?"

"Didn't she have a goat with her when she left?"

"No. What goat?"

Isak wondered and wondered. In the evening when the animals came home, he counted the goats

once over — there were sixteen. He counted them once more, counted them five times. There were sixteen. None missing.

Isak breathed again. But what did it all mean? Oline, miserable creature, couldn't she count as far as sixteen? He asked her angrily: "What's all this nonsense? there *are* sixteen goats."

"Are there sixteen?" she asked innocently.

"Ay."

"Ay, well, then."

"A nice one to count, you are."

Oline answered quietly, in an injured tone, "Since all the goats are there, why, then, thank Heaven, you can't say Oline's been eating them up. And well for her, poor thing."

Oline had taken him in completely with her trickery; he was content, imagining all was well. It did not occur to him, for instance, to count the sheep. He did not trouble about further counting of the stock at all. After all, Oline was not as bad as she might have been; she kept house for him after a fashion, and looked to his cattle; she was merely a fool, and that was worst for herself. Let her stay, let her live — she was not worth troubling about. But it was a grey and joyless thing to be Isak, as life was now.

Years had passed. Grass had grown on the roof of the house, even the roof of the barn, which was some years younger, was green. The wild mouse, native of the woods, had long since found way into the storehouse. Tits and all manner of little birds

swarmed about the place; there were more birds up on the hillside; even the crows had come. And most wonderful of all, the summer before, seagulls had appeared, seagulls coming all the way up from the coast to settle on the fields there in the wilderness. Isak's farm was known far and wide to all wild creatures. And what of Eleseus and little Sivert when they saw the gulls? Oh, 'twas some strange birds from ever so far away; not so many of them, just six white birds, all exactly alike, waddling this way and that about the fields, and pecking at the grass now and then.

"Father, what have they come for?" asked the boys.

"There's foul weather coming out at sea," said their father. Oh, a grand and mysterious thing to see those gulls!

And Isak taught his sons many other things good and useful to know. They were of an age to go to school, but the school was many miles away down in the village, out of reach. Isak had himself taught the boys their A B C on Sundays, but 'twas not for him, not for this born tiller of the soil, to give them any manner of higher education; the Catechism and Bible history lay quietly on the shelf with the cheeses. Isak apparently thought it better for men to grow up without book-knowledge, from the way he dealt with his boys. They were a joy and a blessing to him, the two; many a time he thought of the days when they had been tiny things, and their mother would not let him touch them because his hands were

sticky with resin. Ho, resin, the cleanest thing in the world! Tar and goats' milk and marrow, for instance, all excellent things, but resin, clean gum from the fir — not a word!

So the lads grew up in a paradise of dirt and ignorance, but they were nice lads for all that when they were washed, which happened now and again; little Sivert he was a splendid fellow, though Eleseus was something finer and deeper.

"How do the gulls know about the weather?" he asked.

"They're weather-sick," said his father. "But as for that they're no more so than the flies. How it may be with flies, I can't say, if they get the gout, or feel giddy, or what. But never hit out at a fly, for 'twill only make him worse — remember that, boys! The horsefly he's a different sort, he dies of himself. Turns up suddenly one day in summer, and there he is; then one day suddenly he's gone, and that's the end of him."

"But how does he die?" asked Eleseus.

"The fat inside him stiffens, and he lies there dead."

Every day they learned something new. Jumping down from high rocks, for instance, to keep your tongue in your mouth, and not get it between your teeth. When they grew bigger, and wanted to smell nice for going to church, the thing was to rub oneself with a little tansy that grew on the hillside. Father was full of wisdom. He taught the boys

about stones, about flint, how that the white stone was harder than the grey; but when he had found a flint, he must also make tinder. Then he could strike fire with it. He taught them about the moon, how when you can grip in the hollow side with your left hand it is waxing, and grip in with the right, it's on the wane; remember that, boys! Now and again, Isak would go too far, and grow mysterious; one day he declared that it was harder for a camel to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a human being to thread the eye of a needle. Another time, telling them of the glory of the angels, he explained that angels had stars set in their heels instead of hobnails. Good and simple teaching, well fitted for settlers in the wilds; the schoolmaster in the village would have laughed at it all, but Isak's boys found good use for it in their inner life. They were trained and taught for their own little world, and what could be better? In the autumn, when animals were to be killed, the lads were greatly curious, and fearful, and heavy at heart for the ones that were to die. There was Isak holding with one hand, and the other ready to strike; Oline stirred the blood. The old goat was led out, bearded and wise; the boys stood peeping round the corner. "Filthy cold wind this time," said Eleseus, and turned away to wipe his eyes. Little Sivert cried more openly, could not help calling out: "Oh, poor old goat!" When the goat was killed, Isak came up to them and gave them this lesson: "Never stand around say-

ing 'Poor thing' and being pitiful when things are being killed. It makes them tough and harder to kill. Remember that!"

So the years passed, and now it was nearing spring again.

Inger had written home to say she was well, and was learning a lot of things where she was. Her little girl was big, and was called Leopoldine, after the day she was born, the 15th November. She knew all sorts of things, and was a genius at hemstitch and crochet, wonderful fine work she could do on linen or canvas.

The curious thing about this letter was that Inger had written and spelt it all herself. Isak was not so learned but that he had to get it read for him down in the village, by the man at the store; but once he had got it into his head it stayed there; he knew it off by heart when he got home.

And now he sat down with great solemnity at the head of the table, spread out the letter, and read it aloud to the boys. He was willing enough that Oline also should see how easily he could read writing, but he did not speak so much as a word to her directly. When he had finished, he said: "There now, Eleseus, and you, Sivert, 'tis your mother herself has written that letter and learned all these things. Even that little tiny sister of yours, she knows more than all the rest of us here. Remember that!" The boys sat still, wondering in silence.

"Ay, 'tis a grand thing," said Oline.

And what did she mean by that? Was she doubt-

ing that Inger told the truth? Or had she her suspicions as to Isak's reading? It was no easy matter to get at what Oline really thought, when she sat there with her simple face, saying dark things. Isak determined to take no notice.

"And when your mother comes home, boys, you shall learn to write too," said he to the lads.

Oline shifted some clothes that were hanging near the stove to dry; shifted a pot, shifted the clothes again, and busied herself generally. She was thinking all the time.

"So fine and grand as everything's getting here," she said at last. "I do think you might have bought a paper of coffee for the house."

"*Coffee?*" said Isak. It slipped out.

Oline answered quietly: "Up to now I've bought a little now and again out of my own money, but . . ."

Coffee was a thing of dreams and fairy tales for Isak, a rainbow. Oline was talking nonsense, of course. He was not angry with her, no; but, slow of thought as he was, he called to mind at last her bartering with the Lapps, and he said bitterly:

"Ay, I'll buy you coffee, that I will. A paper of coffee, was it? Why not a pound? A pound of coffee, while you're about it."

"No need to talk that way, Isak. My brother Nils, he gets coffee; down at Breidablik, too, they've coffee."

"Ay, for they've no milk. Not a drop of milk on the place, they've not."

"That's as it may be. But you that know such a lot, and read writing as pat as a cockroach running, you ought to know that coffee's a thing should be in everybody's house."

"You creature!" said Isak.

At that Oline sat down and was not to be silenced. "As for that Inger," said she, "if so be I may dare to say such a word. . . ."

"Say what you will, 'tis all one to me."

"She'll be coming home, and learned everything of sorts. And beads and feathers in her hat, maybe?"

"Ay, that may be."

"Ay," said Oline; "and she can thank me a little for all the way she's grown so fine and grand."

"You?" asked Isak. It slipped out.

Oline answered humbly: "Ay, since 'twas my modest doing that she ever went away."

Isak was speechless at that; all his words were checked, he sat there staring. Had he heard aright? Oline sat there looking as if she had said nothing. No, in a battle of words Isak was altogether lost.

He swung out of the house, full of dark thoughts. Oline, that beast that throve in wickedness and grew fat on it — why had he not wrung her neck the first year? So he thought, trying to pull himself together. He could have done it — he? Couldn't he, though! No one better.

And then a ridiculous thing happened. Isak went into the shed and counted the goats. There they are with their kids, the full number. He counts the

cows, the pig, fourteen hens, two calves. "I'd all but forgotten the sheep," he says to himself; he counts the sheep, and pretends to be all anxiety lest there should be any missing there. Isak knows very well that there is a sheep missing; he has known that a long time; why should he let it appear otherwise? It was this way. Oline had tricked him nicely once before, saying one of the goats was gone, though all the goats were there as they should be; he had made a great fuss about it at the time, but to no purpose. It was always the same when he came into conflict with Oline. Then, in the autumn, at slaughtering time, he had seen at once that there was one ewe short, but he had not found courage to call her to account for it at the time. And he had not found that courage since.

But today he is stern; Isak is stern. Oline has made him thoroughly angry this time. He counts the sheep over again, putting his forefinger on each and counting aloud — Oline may hear it if she likes, if she should happen to be outside. And he says many hard things about Oline — says them out loud; how that she uses a new method of her own in feeding sheep, a method that simply makes them vanish — here's a ewe simply vanished. She is a thieving baggage, nothing less, and she may know it! Oh, he would just have liked Oline to be standing outside and hear it, and be thoroughly frightened for once.

He strides out from the shed, goes to the stable and counts the horse; from there he will go in — will go into the house and speak his mind. He walks so

fast that his shirt stands out like a very angry shirt behind him. But Oline as like as not has noticed something, looking out through the glass window; she appears in the doorway, quietly and steadily, with buckets in her hands, on her way to the cowshed.

"What have you done with that ewe with the flat ears?" he asks.

"Ewe?" she asks.

"Ay. If she'd been here she'd have had two lambs by now. What have you done with them? She always had two. You've done me out of three together, do you understand?"

Oline is altogether overwhelmed, altogether annihilated by the accusation; she wags her head, and her legs seem to melt away under her — she might fall and hurt herself. Her head is busy all the time; her ready wit had always helped her, always served her well; it must not fail her now.

"I steal goats and I steal the sheep," she says quietly. "And what do I do with them, I should like to know? I don't eat them up all by myself, I suppose?"

"You know best what you do with them."

"Ho! As if I didn't have enough and to spare of meat and food and all, with what you give me, Isak, that I should have to steal more? But I'll say that, anyway, I've never needed so much, all these years."

"Well, what have you done with the sheep? Has Os-Anders had it?"

"Os-Anders?" Oline has to set down the

buckets and fold her hands. "May I never have more guilt to answer for! What's all this about a ewe and lambs you're talking of? Is it the goat you mean, with the flat ears?"

"You creature!" said Isak, turning away.

"Well, if you're not a miracle, Isak, I will say . . . Here you've all you could wish for every sort, and a heavenly host of sheep and goats and all in your own shed, and you've not enough. How should I know what sheep, and what two lambs, you're trying to get out of me now? You should be thanking the Lord for His mercies from generation to generation, that you should. 'Tis but this summer and a bit of a way to next winter, and you've the lambing season once more, and three times as many again."

Oh, that woman Oline!

Isak went off grumbling like a bear. "Fool I was not to murder her the first day!" he thought, calling himself all manner of names. "Idiot, lump of rubbish that I was! But it's not too late yet; just wait, let her go to the cowshed if she likes. It wouldn't be wise to do anything tonight, but tomorrow . . . ay, tomorrow morning's the time. Three sheep lost and gone! And coffee, did she say!"

Chapter X

NEXT day was fated to bring a great event. There came a visitor to the farm — Geissler came. It was not yet summer on the moors, but Geissler paid no heed to the state of the ground; he came on foot, in rich high boots with broad, shiny tops; yellow gloves, too, he wore, and was elegant to see; a man from the village carried his things.

He had come, as a matter of fact, to buy a piece of Isak's land, up in the hills — a copper mine. And what about the price? Also, by the way, he had a message from Inger — good girl, every one liked her; he had been in Trondhjem, and seen her. "Isak, you've put in some work here."

"Ay, I dare say And you've seen Inger?"

"What's that you've got over there? Built a mill of your own, have you? grind your own corn? Excellent. And you've turned up a good bit of ground since I was here last."

"Is she well?"

"Eh? Oh, your wife! — yes, she's well and fit. Let's go in the next room. I'll tell you all about it."

"'Tis not in order," put in Oline. Oline had her own reasons for not wishing them to go in.

They went into the little room nevertheless, and closed the door. Oline stood in the kitchen and could hear nothing.

Geissler sat down, slapped his knee with a powerful hand, and there he was — master of Isak's fate.

"You haven't sold that copper tract yet?" he asked.

"No."

"Good. I'll buy it myself. Yes, I've seen Inger and some other people too. She'll be out before long, if I'm not greatly mistaken — the case has been submitted to the King."

"The King?"

"The King, yes. I went in to have a talk with your wife — they managed it for me, of course, no difficulty about that — and we had a long talk. 'Well, Inger, how are you getting on? Nicely, what?' 'Why, I've no cause to complain.' 'Like to be home again?' 'Ay, I'll not say no.' 'And so you shall before very long,' said I. And I'll tell you this much, Isak, she's a good girl, is Inger. No blubbering, not so much as a tear, but smiling and laughing . . . they've fixed up that trouble with her mouth, by the way — operation — sewed it up again. 'Good-bye, then,' said I. 'You won't be here very long, I'll promise you that.'

"Then I went to the Governor — he saw me, of course, no difficulty about that. 'You've a woman here,' said I, 'that ought to be out of the place, and back in her home — Inger Sellanraa.' 'Inger?' said he; 'why, yes. She's a good sort — I wish

we could keep her for twenty years,' said he. 'Well, you won't,' said I. 'She's been here too long already.' 'Too long?' says he. 'Do you know what she's in for?' 'I know all about it,' says I, 'being Lensmand in the district.' 'Oh,' says he, 'won't you sit down?' Quite the proper thing to say, of course. 'Why,' says the Governor then, 'we do what we can for her here, and her little girl too. So she's from your part of the country, is she? We've helped her to get a sewing-machine of her own; she's gone through the workshops right to the top, and we've taught her a deal — weaving, household work, dyeing, cutting out. Been here too long, you say?' Well, I'd got my answer ready for that all right, but it could wait, so I only said her case had been badly muddled, and had to be taken up again; now, after the revision of the criminal code, she'd probably have been acquitted altogether. And I told him about the hare. 'A hare?' says the Governor. 'A hare,' says I. 'And the child was born with a hare-lip.' 'Oh,' says he, smiling, 'I see. And you think they ought to have made more allowance for that?' 'They didn't make any at all,' said I, 'for it wasn't mentioned.' 'Well, I dare say it's not so bad, after all.' 'Bad enough for her, anyway.' 'Do you believe a hare can work miracles, then?' says he. 'As to that,' said I, 'whether a hare can work miracles or not's a matter I won't discuss just now. The question is, what effect the *sight* of a hare might have on a woman with her disfigurement, in her con-

dition.' Well, he thought over that for a bit. 'H'm,' says he at last. 'Maybe, maybe. Anyhow, we're not concerned with that here. All we have to do is to take over the people they send us; not to revise their sentences. And according to her sentence, Inger's not yet finished her time.'

"Well, then, I started on what I wanted to say all along. 'There was a serious oversight made in bringing her here to begin with,' said I. 'An oversight?' 'Yes. In the first place, she ought never to have been sent across the country at all in the state she was in.' He looks at me stiffly. 'No, that's perfectly true,' says he. 'But it's nothing to do with us here, you know.' 'And in the second place,' said I, 'she ought certainly not to have been in the prison for full two months without any notice taken of her condition by the authorities here.' That put him out, I could see; he said nothing for quite a while. 'Are you instructed to act on her behalf?" says he at last. 'Yes, I am,' said I. Well, then, he started on about how pleased they had been with her, and telling me over again all they'd taught her and done for her there — taught her to write too, he said. And the little girl had been put out to nurse with decent people, and so on. Then I told him how things were at home, with Inger away. Two youngsters left behind, and only a hired woman to look after them, and all the rest. 'I've a statement from her husband,' said I, 'that I can submit whether the case be taken up for thorough revision, or an application be made for a par-

don.' 'I'd like to see that statement,' says the Governor. 'Right,' said I. 'I'll bring it along tomorrow in visiting hours.' "

Isak sat listening — it was thrilling to hear, a wonderful tale from foreign parts. He followed Geissler's mouth with slavish eyes.

Geissler went on: "I went straight back to the hotel and wrote out a statement; did the whole thing myself, you understand, and signed it 'Isak Sellanraa.' Don't imagine, though, I said a word against the way they'd managed things in the prison. Not a word. Next day I went along with the paper. 'Won't you sit down?' says the Governor, the moment I got inside the door. He read through what I'd written, nodded here and there, and at last he says: 'Very good, very good indeed. It'd hardly do, perhaps, to have the case brought up again for revision, but . . .' 'Wait a bit,' said I. 'I've another document that I think will make it right.' Had him there again, you see. 'Well,' he says, all of a hurry, 'I've been thinking over the matter since yesterday, and I consider there's good and sufficient grounds to apply for a pardon.' 'And the application would have the Governor's support?' I asked. 'Certainly; yes, I'll give it my best recommendation.' Then I bowed and said: 'In that case, there will be no difficulty about the pardon, of course. I thank you, sir, on behalf of a suffering woman and a stricken home.' Then says he: 'I don't think there should be any need of further declarations — from the district, I mean — about her case. You know

the woman yourself — that should be quite enough.' I knew well enough, of course, why he wanted the thing settled quietly as possible, so I just agreed: said it would only delay the proceedings to collect further material. . . .

" And there you are, Isak, that's the whole story." Geissler looked at his watch. " And now let's get to business. Can you go with me up to the ground again? "

Isak was a stony creature, a stump of a man; he did not find it easy to change the subject all at once; he was all preoccupied with thoughts and wondering, and began asking questions of this and that. He learned that the application had been sent up to the King, and might be decided in one of the first State Councils. " 'Tis all a miracle," said he.

Then they went up into the hills; Geissler, his man, and Isak, and were out for some hours. In a very short time Geissler had followed the lie of the copper vein over a wide stretch of land and marked out the limits of the tract he wanted. Here, there, and everywhere he was. But no fool, for all his hasty movements; quick to judge, but sound enough for all that.

When they came back to the farm once more with a sack full of samples of ore — he got out writing materials and sat down to write. He did not bury himself completely in his writing, though, but talked now and again. " Well, Isak, it won't be such a big sum this time, for the land, but I can give you a couple of hundred *Daler* anyway, on the spot."

Then he wrote again. " Remind me before I go, I want to see that mill of yours," said he. Then he caught sight of some blue and red marks on the frame of the loom, and asked, " Who drew that? " Now that was Eleseus, had drawn a horse and a goat; he used his coloured pencil on the loom and woodwork anywhere, having no paper. " Not at all bad," said Geissler, and gave Eleseus a coin.

Geissler went on writing for a bit, and then looked up. " You'll be having other people taking up land hereabouts before long."

At this the man with him spoke: " There's some started already."

" Ho! And who might that be? "

" Well, first, there's the folk at Breidablik, as they call it — man Brede, at Breidablik."

" Him — puh! " sniffed Geissler contemptuously.

" Then there's one or two others besides, have bought."

" Doubt if they're any good, any of them," said Geissler. And noticing at the same moment that there were two boys in the room, he caught hold of little Sivert and gave him a coin. A remarkable man was Geissler. His eyes, by the way, had begun to look soreish; there was a kind of redness at the edges. Might have been sleeplessness; the same thing comes at times from drinking of strong waters. But he did not look dejected at all; and for all his talking of this and that between times, he was thinking no doubt of his document all the while, for

suddenly he picked up the pen and wrote a piece more.

At last he seemed to have finished.

He turned to Isak: "Well, as I said, it won't make you a rich man all at once, this deal. But there may be more to come. We'll fix it up so that you get more later on. Anyhow, I can give you two hundred now."

Isak understood but little of the whole thing, but two hundred *Daler* was at any rate another miracle, and an unreasonable sum. He would get it on paper, of course, not paid in cash, but let that be. Isak had other things in his head just now.

"And you think she'll be pardoned?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, your wife! Well, if there'd been a telegraph office in the village, I'd have wired to Trondhjem and asked if she hadn't been set free already."

Isak had heard men speak of the telegraph; a wonderful thing, a string hung up on big poles, something altogether above the common earth. The mention of it now seemed to shake his faith in Geissler's big words, and he put in anxiously: "But suppose the King says no?"

Said Geissler: "In that case, I send in my supplementary material, a full account of the whole affair. And then they *must* set her free. There's not a shadow of doubt."

Then he read over what he had written; the contract for purchase of the land. Two hundred *Daler*

cash down, and later, a nice high percentage of receipts from working, or ultimate disposal by further sale, of the copper tract. "Sign your name here," said Geissler.

Isak would have signed readily enough, but he was no scholar; in all his life he had got no farther than cutting initials in wood. But there was that hateful creature Oline looking on; he took up the pen — a beastly thing, too light to handle anyway — turned it right end down, and *wrote* — wrote his name. Whereupon Geissler added something, presumably an explanation, and the man he had brought with him signed as a witness.

Settled.

But Oline was still there, standing immovable — it was indeed but now she had turned so stiff. What was to happen?

"Dinner on the table, Oline," said Isak, possibly with a tough of dignity, after having signed his name in writing on a paper. "Such as we can offer," he added to Geissler.

"Smells good enough," said Geissler. "Sound meat and drink. Here, Isak, here's your money!" Geissler took out his pocket-book — thick and fat it was, too — drew from it two bundles of notes and laid them down. "Count it over yourself."

Not a movement, not a sound.

"Isak," said Geissler again.

"Ay. Yes," answered Isak, and murmured, overwhelmed, "'Tis not that I've asked for it, nor would — after all you've done."

"Ten tens in that — should be, and twenty fives here," said Geissler shortly. "And I hope there'll be more than that by a long way for your share soon."

And then it was that Oline recovered from her trance. The wonder had happened after all. She set the food on the table.

Next morning Geissler went out to the river to look at the mill. It was small enough, and roughly built; ay, a mill for dwarfs, for trollfolk, but strong and useful for a man's work. Isak led his guest a little farther up the river, and showed him another fall he had been working on a bit; it was to turn a saw, if so be God gave him health. "The only thing," he said, "it's a heavy long way from school: I'll have to get the lads to stay down in the village." But Geissler, always so quick to find a way, saw nothing to worry about here. "There are more people buying and settling here now," said he. "It won't be long before there's enough to start a school."

"Ay, maybe, but not before my boys are grown."

"Well, why not let them live on a farm down in the village? You could drive in with the boys and some food, and bring them up again three weeks — six weeks after; it would be easy enough for you, surely?"

"Ay, maybe," said Isak.

Ay, all things would be easy enough, if Inger came home. House and land and food and grand things enough, and a big sum of money too he had,

and his strength; he was hard as nails. Health and strength — ay, full and unspoiled, unworn, in every way, the health and strength of a man.

When Geissler had gone, Isak began thinking of many presumptuous things. Ay, for had not Geissler, that blessing to them all, said at parting that he would send a message very soon — would send a telegram as soon as ever he could. "You can call in at the post office in a fortnight's time," he had said. And that in itself was a wonderful thing enough. Isak set to work making a seat for the cart. A seat, of course, that could be taken off when using the cart for manure, but to be put in again when any one wanted to drive. And when he had got the seat made, it looked so white and new that it had to be painted darker. As for that, there were things enough that had to be done! The whole place wanted painting, to begin with. And he had been thinking for years past of building a proper barn with a bridge, to house in the crop. He had thought, too, of getting that saw set up and finished; of fencing in all his cultivated ground; of building a boat on the lake up in the hills. Many things he had thought of doing. But hard as he worked, unreasonably hard — what did it help against time? Time — it was the time that was too short. It was Sunday before he knew, and then directly after, lo, it was Sunday again!

Paint he would, in any case; that was decided and emphatic. The buildings stood there grey and bare — stood there like houses in their shirt sleeves.

There was time yet before the busy season; the spring was hardly begun yet; the young things were out, but there was frost in the ground still.

Isak goes down to the village, taking with him a few score of eggs for sale, and brings back paint. There was enough for one building, for the barn, and it was painted red. He fetches up more paint, yellow ochre this time, for the house itself. "Ay, 'tis as I said, here's going to be fine and grand," grumbles Oline every day. Ay, Oline could guess, no doubt, that her time at Sellanraa would soon be up; she was tough and strong enough to bear it, though not without bitterness. Isak, on his part, no longer sought to settle up old scores with her now, though she pilfered and put away things lavishly enough towards the end. He made her a present of a young wether; after all, she had been with him a long time, and worked for little pay. And Oline had not been so bad with the children; she was not stern and strictly righteous and that sort of thing, but had a knack of dealing with children: listened to what they said, and let them do more or less as they pleased. If they came round while she was making cheese, she would give them a bit to taste; if they begged to be let off washing their faces one Sunday, she would let them off.

When Isak had given his walls a first coat, he went down to the village again and brought up all the paint he could carry. Three coats he put on in all, and white on the window-frames and corners. To come back now and look at his home there on the

hillside, it was like looking at a fairy palace. The wilderness was inhabited and unrecognizable, a blessing had come upon it, life had arisen there from a long dream, human creatures lived there, children played about the houses. And the forest stretched away, big and kindly, right up to the blue heights.

But the last time Isak went down for paint, the storekeeper gave him a blue envelope with a crest on, and 5 *skilling* to pay. It was a telegram which had been forwarded by post, and was from Lensmand Geissler. A blessing on that man Geissler, wonderful man that he was! He telegraphed these few words, that Inger was free, "Home soonest possible: Geissler." And at this the store took to whirling curiously round and round; the counter and the people in the shop were suddenly far away. Isak felt rather than heard himself saying, *"Herregud!"* and "Praise and thanks to God."

"She might be here no later than tomorrow the day," said the storekeeper, "if so be she's left Trondhjem in time."

"Ho!" said Isak.

He waited till the next day. The carrier came up with letters, from the landing-stage where the steamer put in, but no Inger. "Then she won't be here now till next week," the storekeeper said.

Almost as well, after all, that there was time to wait — Isak has many things to do. Should he forget himself altogether, and neglect his land? He sets off home again and begins carting out manure. It is soon done. He sticks a crowbar into

the earth, noting how the frost disappears from day to day. The sun is big and strong now, the snow is gone, green showing everywhere; the cattle are out to graze. Isak ploughs one day, and a few days later he is sowing corn, planting potatoes. Ho, the youngsters too, planting potatoes like angels; blessed little hands they have, and what can their father do but watch?

Then Isak washes out the cart down by the river, and puts the seat in. Talks to the lads about a little journey; he must have a little journey down to the village.

"But aren't you going to walk?"

"Not today. I've took into my head to go down with horse and cart today."

"Can't we come too?"

"You've got to be good boys, and stay at home this time. Your own mother'll be coming very soon, and she'll learn you a many things."

Eleseus is all for learning things; he asks: "Father, when you did that writing on the paper — what does it feel like?"

"Why, 'tis hardly to feel at all; just like a bit of nothing in the hand."

"But doesn't it slip, like on the ice?"

"What slip?"

"The pen thing, that you write with?"

"Ay, there's the pen. But you have to learn to steer it, you'll see."

But little Sivert he was of another mind, and said nothing about pens; he wanted to ride in the cart;

just to sit up on the seat before the horse was put in, and drive like that, driving ever so fast in a cart without a horse. And it was all his doing that father let them both sit up and ride with him a long way down the road.

Chapter XI

ISAK drives on till he comes to a tarn, a bit of a pool on the moor, and there he pulls up. A pool on the moors, black, deep down, and the little surface of the water perfectly still; Isak knew what that was good for; he had hardly used any other mirror in his life than such a bit of water on the moors. Look how nice and neat he is today, with a red shirt; he takes out a pair of scissors now, and trims his beard. Vain barge of a man; is he going to make himself handsome all at once, and cut away five years' growth of iron beard? He cuts and cuts away, looking at himself in his glass. He might have done all this at home, of course, but was shy of doing it before Oline; it was quite enough to stand there right in front of her nose and put on a red shirt. He cuts and cuts away, a certain amount of beard falls into his patent mirror. The horse grows impatient at last and is moving on; Isak is fain to be content with himself as he is, and gets up again. And indeed he feels somehow younger already — devil knows what it could be, but somehow slighter of build. Isak drives down to the village.

Next day the mail boat comes in. Isak climbs up on a rock by the storekeeper's wharf, looking out, but still no Inger to be seen. Passengers there were,

grown-up folk and children with them — *Herregud!* — but no Inger. He had kept in the background, sitting on his rock, but there was no need to stay behind any longer; he gets down and goes to the steamer. Barrels and cases trundling ashore, people and mailbags, but still Isak lacked what he had come for. There was something there — a woman with a little girl, up at the entrance to the landing-stage already; but the woman was prettier to look at than Inger — though Inger was good enough. What — why — but it was Inger! "H'm," said Isak, and trundled up to meet them. Greetings: "*Goddag*," said Inger, and held out her hand; a little cold, a little pale after the voyage, and being ill on the way. Isak, he just stood there; at last he said:

"H'm. 'Tis a fine day and all."

"I saw you down there all along," said Inger. "But I didn't want to come crowding ashore with the rest. So you're down in the village today?"

"Ay, yes. H'm."

"And all's well at home, everything all right?"

"Ay, thank you kindly."

"This is Leopoldine; she's stood the voyage much better than I did. This is your papa, Leopoldine; come and shake hands nicely."

"H'm," said Isak, feeling very strange — ay, he was like a stranger with them all at once.

Said Inger: "If you find a sewing-machine down by the boat, it'll be mine. And there's a chest as well."

Off goes Isak, goes off more than willingly, after

the chest; the men on board showed him which it was. The sewing-machine was another matter; Inger had to go down and find that herself. It was a handsome box, of curious shape, with a round cover over, and a handle to carry it by — a sewing-machine in these parts! Isak hoisted the chest and the sewing-machine on to his shoulders, and turned to his wife and child:

"I'll have these up in no time, and come back for her after."

"Come back for who?" asked Inger, with a smile. "Did you think she couldn't walk by herself, a big girl like that?"

They walked up to where Isak had left the horse and cart.

"New horse, you've got?" said Inger. "And what's that you've got — a cart with a seat in?"

"'Tis but natural," said Isak. "What I was going to say: Wouldn't you care for a little bit of something to eat? I've brought things all ready."

"Wait till we get a bit on the way," said she. "Leopoldine, can you sit up by yourself?"

But her father won't have it; she might fall down under the wheels. "You sit up with her and drive yourself."

So they drove off, Isak walking behind.

He looked at the two in the cart as he walked. There was Inger, all strangely dressed and strange and fine to look at, with no hare-lip now, but only a tiny scar on the upper lip. No hissing when she talked; she spoke all clearly, and that was the won-

der of it all. A grey-and-red woollen wrap with a fringe looked grand on her dark hair. She turned round in her seat on the cart, and called to him:

"It's a pity you didn't bring a skin rug with you; it'll be cold, I doubt, for the child towards night."

"She can have my jacket," said Isak. "And when we get up in the woods, I've left a rug there on the way."

"Oh, have you a rug up in the woods?"

"Ay. I wouldn't bring it down all the way, for if you didn't come today."

"H'm. What was it you said before — the boys are well and all?"

"Ay, thank you kindly."

"They'll be big lads now, I doubt?"

"Ay, that's true. They've just been planting potatoes."

"Oh!" said the mother, smiling, and shaking her head. "Can they plant potatoes already?"

"Why, Eleseus, he gives a hand with this, and little Sivert helps with that," said Isak proudly.

Little Leopoldine was asking for something to eat. Oh, the pretty little creature; a ladybird up on a cart! She talked with a sing in her voice, with a strange accent, as she had learned in Trondhjem. Inger had to translate now and again. She had her brothers' features, the brown eyes and oval cheeks that all had got from their mother; ay, they were their mother's children, and well that they were so! Isak was something shy of his little girl, shy of her tiny shoes and long, thin, woollen stockings

and short frock; when she had come to meet her strange papa she had curtseyed and offered him a tiny hand.

They got up into the woods and halted for a rest and a meal all round. The horse had his fodder; Leopoldine ran about in the heather, eating as she went.

"You've not changed much," said Inger, looking at her husband.

Isak glanced aside, and said, "No, you think not? But you've grown so grand and all."

"Ha ha! Nay, I'm an old woman now," said she jestingly.

It was no use trying to hide the fact: Isak was not a bit sure of himself now. He could find no self-possession, but still kept aloof, shy, as if ashamed of himself. How old could his wife be now? She couldn't be less than thirty — that is to say, she couldn't be more, of course. And Isak, for all that he was eating already, must pull up a twig of heather and fall to biting that.

"What — are you eating heather?" cried Inger laughingly.

Isak threw down the twig, took a mouthful of food, and going over to the road, took the horse by its forelegs and heaved up its forepart till the animal stood on its hindlegs. Inger looked on with astonishment.

"What are you doing that for?" she asked.

"Oh, he's so playful," said Isak, and set the horse down again.

Now what *had* he done that for? A sudden impulse to do just that thing; perhaps he had done it to hide his embarrassment.

They started off again, and all three of them walked a bit of the way. They came to a new farm.

"What's that there?" asked Inger.

"'Tis Brede's place, that he's bought."

"Brede?"

"Breidablik, he calls it. There's wide moorland, but the timber's poor."

They talked of the new place as they passed on. Isak noticed that Brede's cart was still left out in the open.

The child was growing sleepy now, and Isak took her gently in his arms and carried her. They walked and walked. Leopoldine was soon fast asleep, and Inger said:

"We'll wrap her up in the rug, and she can lie down in the cart and sleep as long as she likes."

"'Twill shake her all to pieces," said Isak, and carries her on. They cross the moors and get into the woods again.

"*Ptro!*" says Inger, and the horse stops. She takes the child from Isak, gets him to shift the chest and the sewing-machine, making a place for Leopoldine in the bottom of the cart. "Shaken? not a bit of it!"

Isak fixes things to rights, tucks his little daughter up in the rug, and lays his jacket folded under her head. Then off again.

Man and wife gossiping of this and that. The

sun is up till late in the evening, and the weather warm.

"Oline," says Inger —"where does she sleep?"

"In the little room."

"Ho! And the boys?"

"They've their own bed in the big room. There's two beds there, just as when you went away."

"Looking at you now," said Inger, "I can see you're just as you were before. And those shoulders of yours, they've carried some burdens up along this way, but they've not grown the weaker by it, seems."

"H'm. Maybe. What I was going to say: How it was like with you all the years there? Bearable like?" Oh, Isak was soft at heart now; he asked her that, and wondered in his mind.

And Inger said: "Ay, 'twas nothing to complain of."

They talked more feelingly together, and Isak asked if she wasn't tired of walking, and would get up in the cart a bit of way. "No, thanks all the same," said she. "But I don't know what's the matter with me today; after being ill on the boat, I feel hungry all the time."

"Why, did you want something, then?"

"Yes, if you don't mind stopping so long."

Oh, that Inger, maybe 'twas not for herself at all, but for Isak's sake. She would have him eat again; he had spoiled his last meal chewing twigs of heather.

And the evening was light and warm, and they had but a few miles more to go; they sat down to eat again.

Inger took a parcel from her box, and said:

"I've a few things I brought along for the boys. Let's go over there in the bushes, it's warmer there."

They went across to the bushes, and she showed him the things; neat braces with buckles for the boys to wear, copy-books with copies at the top of the page, a pencil for each, a pocket-knife for each. And there was an excellent book for herself, she had. "Look, with my name in and all. A prayer-book." It was a present from the Governor, by way of remembrance.

Isak admired each thing in silence. She took out a bundle of little collars — Leopoldine's, they were. And gave Isak a black neckerchief for himself, shiny as silk.

"Is that for me?" said he.

"Yes, it's for you."

He took it carefully in his hands, and stroked it.

"Do you think it's nice?"

"Nice — why I could go round the world in such."

But Isak's fingers were rough; they stuck in the curious silky stuff.

Now Inger had no more things to show. But when she had packed them all up again, she sat there still; and the way she sat, he could see her legs, could see her red-bordered stockings.

"H'm," said he. "Those'll be town-made things, I doubt?"

"'Tis wool was bought in the town, but I knitted them myself. They're ever so long — right up above the knee — look. . . ."

A little while after she heard herself whispering: "Oh, you . . . you're just the same — the same as ever!"

And after that halt they drove on again, and Inger sat up, holding the reins. "I've brought a paper of coffee too," she said. "But you can't have any this evening, for it's not roasted yet."

"'Tis more than's needed this evening and all," said he.

An hour later the sun goes down, and it grows colder. Inger gets down to walk. Together they tuck the rug closer about Leopoldine, and smile to see how soundly she can sleep. Man and wife talk together again on their way. A pleasure it is to hear Inger's voice; none could speak clearer than Inger now.

"Wasn't it four cows we had?" she asks.

"'Tis more than that," says he proudly. "We've eight."

"Eight cows!"

"That is to say, counting the bull."

"Have you sold any butter?"

"Ay, and eggs."

"What, have we chickens now?"

"Ay, of course we have. And a pig."

Inger is so astonished at all this that she forgets herself altogether, and stops for a moment — "*Ptro!*" And Isak is proud and keeps on, trying to overwhelm her completely.

"That Geissler," he says, "you remember him? He came up a little while back."

"Oh?"

"I've sold him a copper mine."

"Ho! What's that — a copper mine?"

"Copper, yes. Up in the hills, all along the north side of the water."

"You — you don't mean he paid you money for it?"

"Ay, that he did. Geissler he wouldn't buy things and not pay for them."

"What did you get, then?"

"H'm. Well, you might not believe it — but it was two hundred *Daler.*"

"You got two hundred *Daler!*" shouts Inger, stopping again with a "*Ptro!*"

"I did — yes. And I've paid for my land a long while back," said Isak.

"Well — you are a wonder, you are!"

Truly, it was a pleasure to see Inger all surprised, and make her a rich wife. Isak did not forget to add that he had no debts nor owings at the store or anywhere else. And he had not only Geissler's two hundred untouched, but more than that — a hundred and sixty *Daler* more. Ay, they might well be thankful to God!

They spoke of Geissler again; Inger was able to tell how he had helped to get her set free. It had not been an easy matter for him, after all, it seemed; he had been a long time getting the matter through, and had called on the Governor ever so many times. Geissler had also written to some of the State Councillors, or some other high authorities; but this he had done behind the Governor's back, and when the Governor heard of it he was furious, which was not surprising. But Geissler was not to be frightened; he demanded a revision of the case, new trial, new examination, and everything. And after that the King had to sign.

Ex-Lensmand Geissler had always been a good friend to them both, and they had often wondered why; he got nothing out of it but their poor thanks — it was more than they could understand. Inger had spoken with him in Trondhjem, and could not make him out. "He doesn't seem to care a bit about any in the village but us," she explained.

"Did he say so?"

"Yes. He's furious with the village here. He'd show them, he said."

"Ho!"

"And they'd find out one day, and be sorry they'd lost him, he said."

They reached the fringe of the wood, and came in sight of their home. There were more buildings there than before, and all nicely painted. Inger hardly knew the place again, and stopped dead.

"You — you don't say that's our place — all that?" she exclaimed.

Little Leopoldine woke at last and sat up, thoroughly rested now; they lifted her out and let her walk.

"Are we there now?" she asked.

"Yes. Isn't it a pretty place?"

There were small figures moving, over by the house; it was Eleseus and Sivert, keeping watch. Now they came running up. Inger was seized with a sudden cold — a dreadful cold in the head, with sniffing and coughing — even her eyes were all red and watering too. It always gives one a dreadful cold on board ship — makes one's eyes wet and all!

But when the boys came nearer they stopped running all of a sudden and stared. They had forgotten what their mother looked like, and little sister they had never seen. But father — they didn't know him at all till he came quite close. He had cut off his heavy beard.

Chapter XII

ALL is well now.

Isak sows his oats, harrows, and rolls it in. Little Leopoldine comes and wants to sit on the roller. Sit on a roller? — nay, she's all too little and unknowing for that yet. Her brothers know better. There's no seat on father's roller.

But father thinks it fine and a pleasure to see little Leopoldine coming up so trustingly to him already; he talks to her, and shows her how to walk nicely over the fields, and not get her shoes full of earth.

"And what's that — why, if you haven't a blue frock on today — come, let me see; ay, 'tis blue, so it is. And a belt round and all. Remember when you came on the big ship? And the engines — did you see them? That's right — and now run home to the boys again, they'll find you something to play with."

Oline is gone, and Inger has taken up her old work once more, in house and yard. She overdoes it a little, maybe, in cleanliness and order, just by way of showing that she was going to have things differently now. And indeed it was wonderful to see what a change was made; even the glass windows in the old turf hut were cleaned, and the boxes swept out.

But it was only the first days, the first week; after that she began to be less eager about the work. There was really no need to take all that trouble about cowsheds and things; she could make better use of her time now. Inger had learned a deal among the town folk, and it would be a pity not to turn it to account. She took to her spinning-wheel and loom again — true enough, she was even quicker and neater than before — a trifle too quick — *hui!* — especially when Isak was looking on; he couldn't make out how any one could learn to use their fingers that way — the fine long fingers she had to her big hands. But Inger had a way of dropping one piece of work to take up another, all in a moment. Well, well, there were more things to be looked to now than before, and maybe she was not altogether so patient as she had been; a trifle of unrest had managed to creep in.

First of all there were the flowers she had brought with her — bulbs and cuttings; little lives these too, that must be thought of. The glass window was too small, the ledge too narrow to set flower-pots on; and besides, she had no flower-pots. Isak must make some tiny boxes for begonias, fuchsias, and roses. Also, one window was not enough — fancy a room with only one window!

And, "Oh, by the way," said Inger, "I want an iron, you know. There isn't one in the place. I could use a flat iron for pressing when I'm sewing dresses and things, but you can't do proper work without an iron of some sort."

Isak promised to get the blacksmith down at the village to make a first-rate pressing-iron. Oh, Isak was ready to do anything, do all that she asked in every way; for he could see well enough that Inger had learned a heap of things now, and matchless clever she was grown. She spoke, too, in a different way, a little finer, using elegant words. She never shouted out to him now as she used to: "Come and get your food!" but would say instead: "Dinner's ready, if you please." Everything was different now. In the old days he would answer simply "Ay," or say nothing at all, and go on working for a bit before he came. Now, he said "Thanks," and went in at once. Love makes the wise a fool: now and then Isak would say "Thanks, thanks." Ay, all was different now — maybe a trifle too fine in some ways. When Isak spoke of dung, and was rough in his speech, as peasants are, Inger would call it manure, "for the sake of the children, you know."

She was careful with the children, and taught them everything, educated them. Let tiny Leopoldine go on quickly with her crochet work, and the boys with writing and schooling; they would not be altogether behindhand when the time came for them to go to school in the village. Eleseus in particular was grown a clever one, but little Sivert was nothing much, if the truth must be told — a madcap, a jack-anapes. He even ventured to screw a little at Mother's sewing-machine, and had already hacked off splinters from table and chairs with his new

pocket-knife. Inger had threatened to take it away altogether.

The children, of course, had all the animals about the place, and Eleseus had still his coloured pencil besides. He used it very carefully, and rarely lent it to his brother, but for all that the walls were covered with blue and red drawings as time went on, and the pencil got smaller and smaller. At last Eleseus was simply forced to put Sivert on rations with it, lending him the pencil on Sunday only, for one drawing. Sivert was not pleased with the arrangement, but Eleseus was a fellow who would stand no nonsense. Not so much as being the stronger, but he had longer arms, and could manage better when it came to a quarrel.

But that Sivert! Now and again he would come across a bird's nest in the woods; once he talked about a mouse-hole he had found, and made a lot of that; another time it was a great fish as big as a man, he had seen in the river. But it was all evidently his own invention; he was somewhat inclined to make black into white, was Sivert, but a good sort for all that. When the cat had kittens, it was he who brought her milk, because she hissed too much for Eleseus. Sivert was never tired of standing looking at the box full of movement, a nest of tumbling furry paws.

The chickens, too, he noticed every day: the cock with his lordly carriage and fine feathers, the hens tripping about chattering low, and pecking at the

sand, or screaming out as if terribly hurt every time they had laid an egg.

And there was the big wether. Little Sivert had read a good deal to what he knew before, but he could not say of the wether that the beast had a fine Roman nose, begad! That he could not say. But he could do better than that. He knew the wether from the day when it had been a lamb, he understood it and was one with it — a kinsman, a fellow-creature. Once, a strange primitive impression flickered through his senses: it was a moment he never forgot. The wether was grazing quietly in the field; suddenly it threw up its head, stopped munching, simply stood there looking out. Sivert looked involuntarily in the same direction. No — nothing remarkable. But Sivert himself felt something strange within him: "'Tis most as if he stood looking into the garden of Eden," he thought.

There were the cows,— the children had each a couple,— great sailing creatures, so friendly and tame that they let themselves be caught whenever you liked; let human children pat them. There was the pig, white and particular about its person when decently looked after, listening to every sound, a comical fellow, always eager for food, and ticklish and fidgety as a girl. And there was the billy-goat; there was always one old billy-goat at Sellanraa, for as soon as one died another was ready to take his place. And was there ever anything so solemnly ridiculous to look at? Just now he had a whole

lot of goats to look after, but at times he would get sick and tired of them all, and lie down, a bearded, thoughtful spectacle, a veritable Father Abraham. And then in a moment, up again and off after the flock. He always left a trail of sourish air behind him.

The daily round of the farm goes on. Now and again a traveller comes by, on his way up to the hills, and asks: "And how's all with ye here?"

And Isak answers: "Ay, thank ye kindly."

Isak works and works, consulting the almanac for all that he does, notes the changes of the moon, pays heed to the signs of the weather, and works on. He has beaten out so much of a track down to the village that he can drive in now with horse and cart, but for the most part, he carries his load himself; carries loads of cheese or hides, and bark and resin, and butter and eggs; all things he can sell, to bring back other wares instead. No, in the summer he does not often drive down — for one thing, because the road down from Breidablik, the last part of the way, is so badly kept. He has asked Brede Olsen to help with the upkeep of the road, and do his share. Brede Olsen promises, but does not hold to his word. And Isak will not ask him again. Rather carry a load on his back himself. And Inger says: "I can't understand how you ever manage it all." Oh, but he could manage anything. He had a pair of boots, so unimaginably heavy and thick, with great slabs of iron on the soles, even the

straps were fastened with copper nails — it was a marvel that one man could walk in such boots at all.

On one of his journeys down, he came upon several gangs of men at work on the moors; putting down stone sockets and fixing telegraph poles. Some of them are from the village, Brede Olsen is there too, for all that he has taken up land of his own and ought to be working on that. Isak wonders that Brede can find time.

The foreman asks if Isak can sell them telegraph poles. Isak says no. Not if he's well paid for them? — No.— Oh, Isak was grown a thought quicker in his dealings now, he could say no. If he sold them a few poles, to be sure it would be money in his pockets, so many *Daler* more; but he had no timber to spare, there was nothing gained by that. The engineer in charge comes up himself to ask, but Isak refuses.

"We've poles enough," says the engineer, "but it would be easier to take them from your ground up there, and save transport."

"I've no timber to spare myself," says Isak. "I want to get up a bit of a saw and do some cutting; there's some more buildings I'll need to have ready soon."

Here Brede Olsen put in a word, and says: "If I was you, Isak, I'd sell them poles."

For all his patience, Isak gave Brede a look and said: "Ay, I dare say you would."

"Well — what?" asks Brede.

"Only that I'm not you," said Isak.

Some of the workmen chuckled a little at this.

Ay, Isak had reason enough just then to put his neighbour down; that very day he had seen three sheep in the fields at Breidablik, and one of them he knew — the one with the flat ears that Oline had bartered away. He may keep it, thought Isak, as he went on his way; Brede and his woman may get all the sheep they want, for me!

That business of the saw was always in his thoughts; it was as he had said. Last winter, when the roads were hard, he had carted up the big circular blade and the fittings, ordered from Trondhjem through the village store. The parts were lying in one of the sheds now, well smeared with oil to keep off the rust. He had brought up some of the beams too, for the framework; he could begin building when he pleased, but he put it off. What could it be? was he beginning to grow slack, was he wearing out? He could not understand it himself. It would have been no surprise to others, perhaps, but Isak could not believe it. Was his head going? He had never been afraid of taking up a piece of work before; he must have changed somehow, since the time when he had built his mill across a river just as big. He could get in help from the village, but he would try again alone; he would start in a day or so — and Inger could lend him a hand.

He spoke to Inger about it.

"Hm. I don't know if you could find time one of these days to lend a hand with that sawmill?"

Inger thought for a moment. "Ye — s, if I can

manage it. So you're going to set up a sawmill?"

"Ay, 'tis my intention so. I've worked it all out in my head."

"Will that be harder than the mill was?"

"Much harder, ten times as hard. Why, it's all got to be as close and exact — down to the tiniest line, and the saw itself exactly midways."

"If only you can manage it," said Inger thoughtlessly.

Isak was offended, and answered, "As to that, we shall see."

"Couldn't you get a man to help you, some one that knows the work?"

"No."

"Well, then, you won't be able to manage it," said she again.

Isak put up his hand to his hair — it was like a bear lifting his paw.

"'Twas just that I've been fearing," said he. "That I might not manage it. And that's why I wanted you that's learned so much to help me."

That was one to the bear. But nothing gained after all. Inger tossed her head and turned aside unkindly, and would have nothing to do with his saw.

"Well, then ——" said Isak.

"Why, do you want me to stand getting drenched in the river and have me laid up? And who's to do all the sewing, and look to the animals and keep house, and all the rest?"

"No, that's true," said Isak.

Oh, but it was only the four corner posts and the middle ones for the two long sides he wanted help with, that was all. Inger — was she really grown so different in her heart through living among folk from the towns?

The fact was that Inger had changed a good deal; she thought now less of their common good than of herself. She had taken loom and wheel into use again, but the sewing machine was more to her taste; and when the pressing-iron came up from the blacksmith's, she was ready to set up as a fully-trained dressmaker. She had a profession now. She began by making a couple of little frocks for Leopoldine. Isak thought them pretty, and praised them, maybe, a thought too much; Inger hinted that it was nothing to what she could do when she tried.

"But they're too short," said Isak.

"They're worn that way in town," said Inger. "You know nothing about it."

Isak saw he had gone too far, and, to make up for it, said something about getting some material for Inger herself, for something or other.

"For a cloak?" said Inger.

"Ay, or what you'd like."

Inger agreed to have something for a cloak, and described the sort of stuff she wanted.

But when she had made the cloak, she had to find some one to show it to; accordingly, when the boys went down to the village to be put to school, Inger herself went with them. And that journey might have seemed a little thing, but it left its mark.

They came first of all to Breidablik, and the Breidablik woman and her children came out to see who it was going by. There sat Inger and the two boys, driving down lordly-wise — the boys on their way to school, nothing less, and Inger wearing a cloak. The Breidablik woman felt a sting at the sight; the cloak she could have done without — thank heaven, *she* set no store by such foolishness! — but . . . she had children of her own — Barbro, a great girl already, Helge, the next, and Kathrine, all of an age for school. The two eldest had been to school before, when they lived down in the village, but after moving up to Breidablik, to an out-of-the-way place up on the moors, they had been forced to give it up, and let the children run heathen again.

"You'll be wanting a bite for the boys, maybe," said the woman.

"Food? Do you see this chest here? It's my travelling trunk, that I brought home with me — I've that full of food."

"And what'll be in it of sorts?"

"What sorts? I've meat and pork in plenty, and bread and butter and cheese besides."

"Ay, you've no lack up at Sellanraa," said the other; and her poor, sallow-faced children listened with eyes and ears to this talk of rich things to eat. "And where will they be staying?" asked the mother.

"At the blacksmith's," said Inger.

"Ho!" said the other. "Ay, mine'll be going to

school again soon. They'll stay with the Lensmand."

"Ho!" said Inger.

"Ay, or at the doctor's, maybe, or at the parsonage. Brede he's in with the great folks there, of course."

Inger fumbled with her cloak, and managed to turn it so that a bit of black silk fringe appeared to advantage.

"Where did you get the cloak?" asked the woman. "One you had with you, maybe?"

"I made it myself."

"Ay, ay, 'tis as I said: wealth and riches full and running over. . . ."

Inger drove on, feeling all set up and pleased with herself, and, coming into the village, she may have been a trifle overproud in her bearing. Lensmand Heyerdahl's lady was not pleased at the sight of that cloak; the Sellanraa woman was forgetting her place — forgetting where it was she had come from after five years' absence. But Inger had at least a chance of showing off her cloak, and the storekeeper's wife and the blacksmith's wife and the schoolmaster's wife all thought of getting one like it for themselves — but it could wait a bit.

And now it was not long before Inger began to have visitors. One or two women came across from the other side of the hills, out of curiosity. Oline had perhaps chanced to say something against her will, to this one or that. Those who came now

brought news from Inger's own birthplace; what more natural than that Inger should give them a cup of coffee, and let them look at her sewing-machine! Young girls came up in pairs from the coast, from the village, to ask Inger's advice; it was autumn now, and they had been saving up for a new dress, and wanted her to help them. Inger, of course, would know all about the latest fashions, after being out in the world, and now and again she would do a little cutting out. Inger herself brightened up at these visits, and was glad; kindly and helpful she was too, and clever at the work, besides; she could cut out material without a pattern. Sometimes she would even hem a whole length on her machine, and all for nothing, and give the stuff back to the girls with a delightful jest: "There — now you can sew the buttons on yourself!"

Later in the year Inger was sent for down to the village, to do dressmaking for some of the great folks there. Inger could not go; she had a household to look after, and animals besides, all the work of the home, and she had no servant.

Had no what? Servant!

She spoke to Isak one day.

"If only I had some one to help me, I could put in more time sewing."

Isak did not understand. "Help?"

"Yes, help in the house — a servant-girl."

Isak must have been taken aback at this; he

laughed a little in his iron beard, and took it as a jest. "Ay, we should have a servant-girl," said he.

"Housewives in the towns always have a servant," said Inger.

"Ho!" said Isak.

Well, Isak was not perhaps in the best of humour just then, not exactly gentle and content, no, for he had started work on that sawmill, and it was a slow and toilsome business; he couldn't hold the baulks with one hand, and a level in the other, and fix ends at the same time. But when the boys came back from school again it was easier; the lads were useful and a help, bless them! Sivert especially had a genius for knocking in nails, but Eleseus was better at handling a plumb-line. By the end of a week, Isak and the boys had actually got the foundation posts in, and soundly fixed with stretcher pieces as thick as the beams themselves.

It worked out all right — everything worked out all right somehow. But Isak was beginning to feel tired in the evenings now — whatever it could be. It was not only building a sawmill and getting that done — there was everything else besides. The hay was in, but the corn was standing yet, soon it would have to be cut and stacked; there were the potatoes too, they would have to be taken up before long. But the boys were a wonderful help. He did not thank them; 'twas not the way among folk of their sort, but he was mightily pleased with them for all that. Now and again they would sit down in the middle of their work and talk together, the father almost asking his sons' advice as to what they

should do next. Those were proud moments for the lads, they learned also to think well before they spoke, lest they should be in the wrong.

"'Twould be a pity not to have the saw roofed in before the autumn rains," said their father.

If only Inger had been as in the old days! But Inger was not so strong as she had been, it seemed, and that was natural enough after her long spell within walls. That her mind, too, seemed changed was another matter. Strange, how little thought, how little care, she seemed to take now; shallow and heedless — was this Inger?"

One day she spoke of the child she had killed.

"And a fool I was to do it," she said. "We might have had her mouth sewed up too, and then I needn't have throttled her" And she never stole off now to a tiny grave in the forest, where once she had patted the earth with her hands and set up a little cross.

But Inger was not altogether heartless yet; she cared for her other children, kept them clean and made new clothes for them; she would sit up late at night mending their things. It was her ambition to see them get on in the world.

The corn was stacked, and the potatoes were taken up. Then came the winter. No, the sawmill did not get roofed in that autumn, but that could not be helped — after all, 'twas not a matter of life or death. Next summer would be time and means enough.

Chapter XIII

THE winter round of work was as before; carting wood, mending tools and implements. Inger kept house, and did sewing in her spare time. The boys were down in the village again for the long term at school. For several winters past they had had a pair of *ski* between them; they managed well enough that way as long as they were at home, one waiting while the other took his turn, or one standing on behind the other. Ay, they managed finely with but one pair, it was the finest thing they knew, and they were innocent and glad. But down in the village things were different. The school was full of *ski;* even the children at Breidablik, it seemed, had each a pair. And the end of it was that Isak had to make a new pair for Eleseus, Sivert keeping the old pair for his own.

Isak did more; he had the boys well clad, and gave them everlasting boots. But when that was done, Isak went to the storekeeper and asked for a ring.

"A ring?" said the man.

"A finger ring. Ay, I've grown that high and mighty now I must give my wife a ring."

"Do you want a silver one, or gold, or just a brass ring dipped to look like gold?"

"Let's say a silver ring."

The storekeeper thought for a while.

"Look you, Isak," he said. "If you want to do the proper thing, and give your wife a ring she needn't be ashamed to wear, you'd better make it a gold ring."

"What!" said Isak aloud. Though maybe in his inmost heart he had been thinking of a gold ring all the time.

They talked the matter over seriously, and agreed about getting a measurement of some sort for the ring. Isak was thoughtful, and shook his head and reckoned it was a big thing to do, but the storekeeper refused to order anything but a gold ring. Isak went home again, secretly pleased with his decision, but somewhat anxious, for all that, at the extravagant lengths he had gone to, all for being in love with his wife.

There was a good average snowfall that winter, and early in the year, when the roads were passable, folk from the village began carting up telegraph poles over the moors, dropping their loads at regular intervals. They drove big teams, and came up past Breidablik, past Sellanraa farm, and met new teams beyond, coming down with poles from the other side of the hills — the line was complete.

So life went on day by day, without any great event. What was there to happen, anyway? Spring came, and the work of setting up the poles began. Brede Olsen was there again, with the gangs, though he should have been working on his

own land at that season. " 'Tis a wonder he's the time," thought Isak.

Isak himself had barely time to eat and sleep; it was a close thing to get through the season's work now, with all the land he had brought under tillage.

Then, between seasons, he got his sawmill roofed in, and could set to work putting up the machine parts. And look you, 'twas no marvel of fine woodwork he had set up, but strong it was, as a giant of the hills, and stood there to good use. The saw could work, and cut as a sawmill should; Isak had kept his eyes about him down in the village, and used them well. It was hearty and small, this sawmill he had built, but he was pleased with it; he carved the date above the doorway, and put his mark.

And that summer, something more than usual did come about after all at Sellenraa.

The telegraph workers had now reached so far up over the moors that the foremost gang came to the farm one evening and asked to be lodged for the night. They were given shelter in the big barn. As the days went on, the other gangs came along, and all were housed at Sellanraa. The work went on ahead, passing the farm, but the men still came back to sleep in the barn. One Saturday evening came the engineer in charge, to pay the men.

At sight of the engineer, Eleseus felt his heart jump, and stole out of the house lest he should be asked about that coloured pencil. Oh, there would be trouble now — and Sivert nowhere to be seen;

he would have to face it alone. Eleseus slipped round the corner of the house, like a pale ghost, found his mother, and begged her to tell Sivert to come. There was no help for it now.

Sivert took the matter less to heart — but then, he was not the chief culprit. The two brothers went a little way off and sat down, and Eleseus said: "If you'd say it was you, now!"

"Me?" said Sivert.

"You're younger, he wouldn't do anything to you."

Sivert thought over it, and saw that his brother was in distress; also it flattered him to feel that the other needed his help.

"Why, I might help you out of it, perhaps," said he in a grown-up voice.

"Ay, if you would!" said Eleseus, and quite simply gave his brother the bit of pencil that was left. "You can have it for keeps," he said.

They were going in again together, but Eleseus recollected he had something he must do over at the sawmill, or rather, at the cornmill; something he must look to, and it would take some time — he wouldn't be finished just yet. Sivert went in alone.

There sat the engineer, paying out notes and silver, and when he had finished, Inger gave him milk to drink, a jug and a glass, and he thanked her. Then he talked to little Leopoldine, and then, noticing the drawings on the walls, asked straight out who had done that. "Was it you?" he asked, turning to Sivert. The man felt, perhaps, he owed

something for Inger's hospitality, and praised the drawings just to please her. Inger, on her part, explained the matter as it was: it was her boys had made the drawings — both of them. They had no paper till she came home and looked to things, so they had marked all about the walls. But she hadn't the heart to wash it off again.

"Why, leave it as it is," said the engineer. "Paper, did you say?" And he took out a heap of big sheets. "There, draw away on that till I come round again. And how are you off for pencils?"

Sivert stepped forward simply with the stump he had, and showed how small it was. And behold, the man gave him a new coloured pencil, not even sharpened. "There, now you can start afresh. But I'd make the horses red if I were you, and do the goats with blue. Never seen a blue horse, have you?"

And the engineer went on his way.

That same evening, a man came up from the village with a basket — he handed out some bottles to the workmen, and went off again. But after he had gone, it was no longer so quiet about the place; some one played an accordion, the men talked loudly, and there was singing, and even dancing, at Sellanraa. One of the men asked Inger out to dance, and Inger — who would have thought it of her? — she laughed a little laugh and actually danced a few turns round. After that, some of the others asked her, and she danced not a little in the end.

Inger — who could say what was in her mind? Here she was dancing gaily, maybe for the first time

in her life; sought after, riotously pursued by thirty men, and she alone, the only one to choose from, no one to cut her out. And those burly telegraph men — how they lifted her! Why not dance? Eleseus and Sivert were fast asleep in the little chamber, undisturbed by all the noise outside; little Leopoldine was up, looking on wonderingly at her mother as she danced.

Isak was out in the fields all the time; he had gone off directly after supper, and when he came home to go to bed, some one offered him a bottle. He drank a little, and sat watching the dancing, with Leopoldine on his lap.

"'Tis a gay time you're having," said he kindly to Inger —" footing it properly tonight!"

After a while, the music stopped, and the dance was over. The workmen got ready to leave — they were going down to the village for the rest of the evening, and would be there all next day, coming back on Monday morning. Soon all was quiet again at Sellanraa; a couple of the older men stayed behind, and turned in to sleep in the barn.

Isak woke up in the night — Inger was not there. Could she be gone to see to the cows? He got up and went across to the cowshed. "Inger!" he called. No answer. The cows turned their heads and looked at him; all was still. Unthinkingly, from ancient habit, he counted heads, counted the sheep also; there was one of the ewes had a bad habit of staying out at night — and out it was now. "Inger!" he called again. Still no answer.

Surely she couldn't have gone with them down to the village?

The summer night was light and warm. Isak stayed a while sitting on the door-slab, then he went out into the woods to look for the ewe. And he found Inger. Inger and one other. They sat in the heather, she twirling his peaked cap on one finger, both talking together — they were after her again, it seemed.

Isak trundled slowly over towards them. Inger turned and saw him, and bowed forward where she sat; all the life went out of her, she hung like a rag.

"H'm. Did you know that ewe's out again?" asked Isak. "But no, you wouldn't know," said he.

The young telegraph hand picked up his cap and began sidling away. "I'll be getting along after the others," he said. "Good-night to ye." No one answered.

"So you're sitting here," said Isak. "Going to stay out a bit, maybe?" And he turned towards home. Inger rose to her knees, got on her feet and followed after, and so they went, man in front and wife behind, tandem-wise. They went home.

Inger must have found time to think. Oh, she found a way. "'Twas the ewe I was after," said she. "I saw it was out again. Then one of the men came up and helped me look. We'd not been sitting a moment when you came. Where are you going now?"

"I? Seems I'd better look for the creature myself."

"No, no, go and lie down. If any one's to go, let me. Go and lie down, you'll be needing rest. And as for that, the ewe can stay out where she is — 'twon't be the first time."

"And be eaten up by some beast or other," said Isak, and went off.

Inger ran after him. "Don't, don't, it's not worth it," she said. "You need rest. Let me go."

Isak gave in. But he would not hear of Inger going out to search by herself. And they went indoors together.

Inger turned at once to look for the children; went into the little chamber to see to the boys, as if she had been out on some perfectly natural errand; it almost seemed, indeed, as if she were trying to make up to Isak — as if she expected him to be more in love with her than ever that evening — after she had explained it all so neatly. But no, Isak was not so easy to turn; he would rather have seen her thoroughly distressed and beside herself with contrition. Ay, that would have been better. What matter that she had collapsed for a moment when he came on her in the woods; the little moment of shame — what was the good of that when it all passed off so soon?

He was far from gentle, too, the next day, and that a Sunday; went off and looked to the sawmill, looked to the cornmill, looked over the fields, with the children or by himself. Inger tried once to join him, but Isak turned away: "I'm going up to the river," he said. "Something up there . . ."

There was trouble in his mind, like enough, but he bore it silently, and made no scene. Oh, there was something great about Isak; as it might be Israel, promised and ever deceived, but still believing.

By Monday the tension was less marked, and as the days went on, the impression of that unhappy Saturday evening grew fainter. Time can mend a deal of things; a spit and a shake, a meal and a good night's rest, and it will heal the sorriest of wounds. Isak's trouble was not so bad as it might have been; after all, he was not certain that he had been wronged, and apart from that, he had other things to think of; the harvesting was at hand. And last, not least, the telegraph line was all but finished now; in a little while they would be left in peace. A broad light road, a king's highway, had been cut through the dark of the forest; there were poles and wires running right up over the hills.

Next Saturday paytime, the last there was to be, Isak managed to be away from home — he wished it so. He went down into the village with cheese and butter, and came back on Sunday night. The men were all gone from the barn; nearly all, that is; the last man stumbled out of the yard with his pack on his shoulder — all but the last, that is. That it was not altogether safe as yet Isak could see, for there was a bundle left on the floor of the barn. Where the owner was he could not say, and did not care to know, but there was a peaked cap on top of the bundle — an offence to the eye.

Isak heaved the bundle out into the yard, flung

the cap out after it, and closed the door. Then he went into the stable and looked out through the window. And thought, belike: "Let the bundle stay there, and let the cap lie there, 'tis all one whose they may be. A bit of dirt he is, and not worth my while"— so he might have thought. But when the fellow comes for his bundle, never doubt but that Isak will be there to take him by the arm and make that arm a trifle blue. And as for kicking him off the place in a way he'd remember — why, Isak would give him that too!

Whereupon Isak left his window in the stable and went back to the cowshed and looked out from there, and could not rest. The bundle was tied up with string; the poor fellow had no lock to his bag, and the string had come undone — Isak could not feel sure he had not dealt over hardly with that bundle. Whatever it might be — he was not sure he had acted rightly. Only just now he had been in the village, and seen his new harrow, a brand-new harrow he had ordered — oh, a wonderful machine, an idol to worship, and it had just come. A thing like that must carry a blessing with it. And the powers above, that guide the footsteps of men, might be watching him now at this moment, to see if he deserved a blessing or not. Isak gave much thought to the powers above; ay, he had seen God with his own eyes, one night in harvest-time, in the woods; it was rather a curious sight.

Isak went out into the yard and stood over the bundle. He was still in doubt; he thrust his hat back

and scratched his head, which gave him a devil-may-care appearance for the moment; something lordly and careless, as it might have been a Spaniard. But then he must have thought something like this: "Nay, here am I, and far from being in any way splendid or excellent; a very dog." And then he tied up the bundle neatly once more, picked up the cap, and carried all back into the barn again. And that was done.

As he went out from the barn and over to the mill, away from the yard, away from everything, there was no Inger to be seen in the window of the house. Nay, then, let her be where she pleased — no doubt she was in bed — where else should she be? But in the old days, in those first innocent years, Inger could never rest, but sat up at nights waiting for him when he had been down to the village. It was different now, different in every way. As, for instance, when he had given her that ring. Could anything have been more utterly a failure? Isak had been gloriously modest, and far from venturing to call it a gold ring. "'Tis nothing grand, but you might put it on your finger just to try."

"Is it gold?" she asked.

"Ay, but 'tis none so thick," said he.

And here she was to have answered: "Ay, but indeed it is." But instead she had said: "No, 'tis not very thick, but still . . ."

"Nay, 'tis worth no more than a bit of grass, belike," said he at last, and gave up hope.

But Inger had indeed been glad of the ring, and

wore it on her right hand, looking fine there when she was sewing; now and again she would let the village girls try it on, and sit with it on their finger for a bit when they came up to ask of this or that. Foolish Isak — not to understand that she was proud of it beyond measure! . . .

It was a profitless business sitting there alone in the mill, listening to the fall the whole night through. Isak had done no wrong; he had no cause to hide himself away. He left the mill, went up over the fields, and home — into the house.

And then in truth it was a shamefaced Isak, shamefaced and glad. Brede Olsen sat there, his neighbour and no other; sat there drinking coffee. Ay, Inger was up, the two of them sat there simply and quietly, talking and drinking coffee.

"Here's Isak," said Inger pleasantly as could be, and got up and poured out a cup for him. "Evening," said Brede, and was just as pleasant too.

Isak could see that Brede had been spending the evening with the telegraph gangs, the last night before they went; he was somewhat the worse for it, maybe, but friendly and good-humoured enough. He boasted a little, as was his way: hadn't the time really to bother with this telegraphic work, the farm took all of a man's day — but he couldn't very well say no when the engineer was so anxious to have him. And so it had come about, too, that Brede had had to take over the job of line inspector. Not for the sake of the money, of course, he could earn many times that down in the village, but he hadn't liked

to refuse. And they'd given him a neat little machine set up on the wall, a curious little thing, a sort of telegraph in itself.

Ay, Brede was a wastrel and a boaster, but for all that Isak could bear him no grudge; he himself was too relieved at finding his neighbour in the house that evening instead of a stranger. Isak had the peasant's coolness of mind, his few feelings, stability, stubbornness; he chatted with Brede and nodded at his shallowness. "Another cup for Brede," said he. And Inger poured it out.

Inger talked of the engineer; a kindly man he was beyond measure; had looked at the boys' drawings and writings, and even said something about taking Eleseus to work under him.

"To work with him?" said Isak.

"Ay, to the town. To do writing and things, be a clerk in the office — all for he was so pleased with the boy's writing and drawing."

"Ho!" said Isak.

"Well, and what do you say? He was going to have him confirmed too. That was a great thing, to my mind."

"Ay, a great thing indeed," said Brede. "And when the engineer says he'll do a thing, he'll do it. I know him, and you can take my word for that."

"We've no Eleseus to spare on this farm as I know of," said Isak.

There was something like a painful silence after that. Isak was not an easy man to talk to.

"But when the boy himself wants to get on," said

Inger at last, " and has it in him, too." Silence again.

Then said Brede with a laugh: " I wish he'd ask for one of mine, anyway. I've enough of them and to spare. But Barbro's the eldest, and she's a girl."

" And a good girl enough," said Inger, for politeness' sake.

" Ay, I'll not say no," said Brede. " Barbro's well enough, and clever at this and that — she's going to help at the Lensmand's now."

" Going to the Lensmand's? "

" Well, I had to let her go — his wife was so set on it, I couldn't say no."

It was well on towards morning now, and Brede rose to go.

" I've a bundle and a cap I left in your barn," he said. " That is if the men haven't run off with it," he added jestingly.

Chapter XIV

AND time went on.

Yes, Eleseus was sent to town after all; Inger managed that. He was there for a year, then he was confirmed, and after that had a regular place in the engineer's office, and grew more and more clever at writing and things. To see the letters he sent home — sometimes with red and black ink, like pictures almost. And the talk of them, the words he used. Now and again he asked for money, something towards his expenses. A watch and chain, for instance, he must have, so as not to oversleep himself in the morning and be late at the office; money for a pipe and tobacco also, such as the other young clerks in the town always had. And for something he called pocket-money, and something he called evening classes, where he learned drawing and gymnastics and other matters proper to his rank and position. Altogether, it was no light matter to keep Eleseus going in a berth in town.

"Pocket-money?" said Isak. "Is that money to keep in your pocket, maybe?"

"That must be it, no doubt," said Inger. "So as not to be altogether without. And it's not much; only a *Daler* now and then."

"Ay, that's just it," said Isak harshly. "A

Daler now and a *Daler* then . . ." But his harshness was all because he missed Eleseus himself, and wanted him home. "It makes too many *Dalers* in the long run," said he. "I can't keep on like this; you must write and tell him he can have no more."

"Ho, very well then!" said Inger in an offended tone.

"There's Sivert — what does he get by way of pocket-money?"

Inger answered: "You've never been in a town, and so you don't know these things. Sivert's no need of pocket-money. And talking of money, Sivert ought to be none so badly off when his Uncle Sivert dies."

"You don't know."

"Ay, but I do know."

And this was right enough in a way; Uncle Sivert had said something about making little Sivert his heir. Uncle Sivert had heard of Eleseus and his grand doings in town, and the story did not please him; he nodded and bit his lips, and muttered that a nephew called up as his namesake — named after Uncle Sivert — should not come to want. But what was this fortune Uncle Sivert was supposed to possess? Had he really, besides his neglected farm and his fishery, the heap of money and means folk generally thought? No one could say for certain. And apart from that, Uncle Sivert himself was an obstinate man; he insisted that little Sivert should come to stay with him. It was a point of honour with him, this last; he should take little Sivert and

look after him, as the engineer had done with Eleseus.

But how could it be done? Send little Sivert away from home? — it was out of the question. He was all the help left to Isak now. Moreover, the lad himself had no great wish to go and stay with his famous uncle; he had tried it once, but had come home again. He was confirmed, shot up in stature, and grew; the down showed on his cheek, his hands were big, a pair of willing slaves. And he worked like a man.

Isak could hardly have managed to get the new barn built at all without Sivert's help — but there it stood now, with bridge-way and air-holes and all, as big as they had at the parsonage itself. True, it was only a half-timbered building covered with boarding, but extra stout built, with iron clinches at the corners, and covered with one-inch plank from Isak's own sawmill. And Sivert had hammered in more than one nail at the work, and lifted the heavy beams for the framework till he was near fainting. Sivert got on well with his father, and worked steadily at his side; he was made of the same stuff. And yet he was not above such simple ways as going up the hill-side for tansy to rub with so as to smell nice in church. 'Twas Leopoldine was the one for getting fancies in her head, which was natural enough, she being a girl, and the only daughter. That summer, if you please, she had discovered that she could not eat her porridge at supper without treacle — simply

couldn't. And she was no great use at any kind of work either.

Inger had not yet given up her idea of keeping a servant; she brought up the question every spring, and every time Isak opposed it stubbornly. All the cutting out and sewing and fine weaving she could do, not to speak of making embroidered slippers, if she had but the time to herself! And of late, Isak had been something less firm in his refusal, though he grumbled still. Ho, the first time! He had made a whole long speech about it; not as a matter of right and reason, nor yet from pride, but, alas! from weakness, from anger at the idea. But now, he seemed to be giving way, as if ashamed.

"If ever I'm to have help in the house, now's the time," said Inger. "A few years more, and Leopoldine'll be big enough to do this and that."

"Help?" said Isak. "What do you want help with, anyway?"

"Want with it, indeed? Haven't you help yourself? Haven't you Sivert all the time?"

What could Isak say to a meaningless argument like that? He answered: "Ay, well; when you get a girl up here, I doubt you'll be able to plough and sow and reap and manage all by yourselves. And then Sivert and I can go our ways."

"That's as may be," said Inger. "But I'll just say this: that I could get Barbro to come now; she's written home about it."

"What Barbro?" said Isak. "Is it that Brede's girl you mean?"

"Yes. She's in Bergen now."

"I'll not have that Brede's girl Barbro up here," said he. "Whoever you get, I'll have none of her."

That was better than nothing; Isak refused to have Barbro; he no longer said they would have no servant at all.

Barbro from Breidablik was not the sort of girl Isak approved of; she was shallow and unsettled like her father — maybe like her mother too — a careless creature, no steady character at all. She had not stayed long at the Lensmand's; only a year. After her confirmation, she went to help at the storekeeper's, and was there another year. Here she turned pious and got religion, and when the Salvation Army came to the village she joined it, and went about with a red band on her sleeve and carried a guitar. She went to Bergen in that costume, on the storekeeper's boat — that was last year. And she had just sent home a photograph of herself to her people at Breidablik. Isak had seen it; a strange young lady with her hair curled up and a long watch-chain hanging down over her breast. Her parents were proud of little Barbro, and showed the photograph about to all who came; 'twas grand to see how she had learned town ways and got on in the world. As for the red band and the guitar, she had given them up, it seemed.

"I took the picture along and showed it to the Lensmand's lady," said Brede. "She didn't know her again."

"Is she going to stay in Bergen?" said Isak suspiciously.

"Why, unless she goes on to Christiania, perhaps," said Brede. "What's there for her to do here? She's got a new place now, as housekeeper, for two young clerks. They've no wives nor womenfolk of their own, and they pay her well."

"How much?" said Isak.

"She doesn't say exactly in the letter. But it must be something altogether different from what folk pay down here, that's plain. Why, she gets Christmas presents, and presents other times as well, and not counted off her wages at all."

"Ho!" said Isak.

"You wouldn't like to have her up at your place?" asked Brede.

"I?" said Isak, all taken aback.

"No, of course, he he! It was only a way of speaking. Barbro's well enough where she is. What was I going to say? You didn't notice anything wrong with the line coming down — the telegraph, what?"

"With the telegraph? No."

"No, no . . . There's not much wrong with it now since I took over. And then I've my own machine here on the wall to give a warning if anything happens. I'll have to take a walk up along the line one of these days and see how things are. I've too much to manage and look after, 'tis more than one man's work. But as long as I'm Inspector here, and hold an official position, of course I can't neglect

my duties. If I hadn't the telegraph, of course . . . and it may not be for long. . . ."

"Why?" said Isak. "You thinking of giving it up, maybe?"

"Well, I can't say exactly," said Brede. "I haven't quite decided. They want me to move down into the village again."

"Who is it wants you?" asked Isak.

"Oh, all of them. The Lensmand wants me to go and be assistant there again, and the doctor wants me to drive for him, and the parson's wife said more than once she misses me to lend a hand, if it wasn't such a long way to go. How was it with that strip of hill, Isak — the bit you sold? Did you get as much for it as they say?"

"Ay, 'tis no lie," answered Isak.

"But what did Geissler want with it, anyway? It lies there still — curious thing! Year after year and nothing done."

It was a curious thing; Isak had often wondered about it himself; he had spoken to the Lensmand about it, and asked for Geissler's address, thinking to write to him. . . . Ay, it was a mystery.

"'Tis more than I can say," said Isak.

Brede made no secret of his interest in this matter of the sale. "They say there's more of the same sort up there," he said, "besides yours. Maybe there's more in it than we know. 'Tis a pity that we should sit here like dumb beasts and know nothing of it all. I've thought of going up one day myself to have a look."

"But do you know anything about metals and such-like?" asked Isak.

"Why, I know a bit. And I've asked one or two others. Anyhow, I'll have to find something; I can't live and keep us all here on this bit of a farm. It's sheer impossible. 'Twas another matter with you that's got all that timber and good soil below. 'Tis naught but moorland here."

"Moorland's good soil enough," said Isak shortly. "I've the same myself."

"But there's no draining it," said Brede. . . . "It can't be done."

But it could be done. Coming down the road that day Isak noticed other clearings; two of them were lower down, nearer the village, but there was one far up above, between Breidablik and Sellanraa — ay, men were beginning to work on the land now; in the old days when Isak first came up, it had lain waste all of it. And these three new settlers were folks from another district; men with some sense in their heads, by the look of things. They didn't begin by borrowing money to build a house; no, they came up one year and did their spade work and went away again; vanished as if they were dead. That was the proper way; ditching first, then plough and sow. Axel Ström was nearest to Isak's land now, his next-door neighbour. A clever fellow, unmarried, he came from Helgeland. He had borrowed Isak's new harrow to break up his soil, and not till the second year had he set up a hayshed and a turf hut for himself and a couple of animals. He had

called his place Maaneland, because it looked nice in the moonlight. He had no womenfolk himself, and found it difficult to get help in the summer, lying so far out, but he managed things the right way, no doubt about that. Not as Brede Olsen did, building a house first, and then coming up with a big family and little ones and all, with neither soil nor stock to feed them. What did Brede Olsen know of draining moorland and breaking new soil?

He knew how to waste his time idling, did Brede. He came by Sellanraa one day, going up to the hills — simply to look for precious metals. He came back the same evening; had not found anything definite, he said, but certain signs — and he nodded. He would come up again soon, and go over the hills thoroughly, over towards Sweden.

And sure enough, Brede came up again. He had taken a fancy to the work, no doubt; but he called it telegraph business this time — must go up and look over the whole of the line. Meanwhile his wife and children at home looked after the farm, or left it to look after itself. Isak was sick and tired of Brede's visits, and went out of the room when he came; then Inger and Brede would sit talking heartily together. What could they have to talk about? Brede often went down to the village, and had always some news to tell of the great folk there; Inger, on the other hand, could always draw upon her famous journey to Trondhjem and her stay there. She had grown talkative in the years she had been away, and was always ready to gossip with any one.

No, she was no longer the same straightforward, simple Inger of the old days.

Girls and women came up continually to Sellanraa to have a piece of work cut out, or a long hem put through the machine in a moment, and Inger entertained them well. Oline too came again, couldn't help it, belike; came both spring and autumn; fair-spoken, soft as butter, and thoroughly false. "Just looked along to see how things are with you," she said each time. "And I've been longing so for a sight of the lads, I'm that fond of them, the little angels they were. Ay, they're big fellows now, but it's strange . . . I can't forget the time when they were small and I had them in my care. And here's you building and building again, and making a whole town of the place. Going to have a bell to ring, maybe, at the roof of the barn, same as at the parsonage?"

Once Oline came and brought another woman with her, and the pair of them and Inger had a nice day together. The more Inger had sitting round her, the better she worked at her sewing and cutting out, making a show of it, waving her scissors and swinging the iron. It reminded her of the place where she had learned it all — there was always many of them in the workrooms there. Inger made no secret of where she had got her knowledge and all her art from; it was from Trondhjem. It almost appeared as if she had not been in prison at all, in the ordinary way, but at school, in an institute, where one could learn to sew and weave and write, and do

dressing and dyeing — all that she had learned in Trondhjem. She spoke of the place as of a home; there were so many people she knew there, superintendents and forewomen and attendants, it had been dull and empty to come back here again, and hard to find herself altogether cut off from the life and society she had been accustomed to. She even made some show of having a cold — couldn't stand the keen air there; for years after her return she had been too poorly to work out of doors in all seasons. It was for the outside work she really ought to have a servant.

"Ay, Heaven save us," said Oline, "and why shouldn't you have a servant indeed, when you've means and learning and a great fine house and all!"

It was pleasant to meet with sympathy, and Inger did not deny it. She worked away at her machine till the place shook, and the ring on her finger shone.

"There, you can see for yourself," said Oline to the woman with her. "It's true what I said, Inger she wears a gold ring on her finger."

"Would you like to see it?" asked Inger, taking it off.

Oline seemed still to have her doubts; she turned it in her fingers as a monkey with a nut, looked at the mark. "Ay, 'tis as I say; Inger with all her means and riches."

The other woman took the ring with veneration, and smiled humbly. "You can put it on for a bit if

you like," said Inger. "Don't be afraid, it won't break."

And Inger was amiable and kind. She told them about the cathedral at Trondhjem, and began like this: "You haven't seen the cathedral at Trondhjem, maybe? No, you haven't been there!" And it might have been her own cathedral, from the way she praised it, boasted of it, told them height and breadth; it was a marvel! Seven priests could stand there preaching all at once and never hear one another. "And then I suppose you've never seen St. Olaf's Well? Right in the middle of the cathedral itself, it is, on one side, and it's a bottomless well. When we went there, we took each a little stone with us, and dropped it in, but it never reached the bottom."

"Never reached the bottom?" whispered the two women, shaking their heads.

"And there's a thousand other things besides in that cathedral," exclaimed Inger delightedly. "There's the silver chest to begin with. It's Holy St. Olaf his own silver chest that he had. But the Marble Church — that was a little church all of pure marble — the Danes took that from us in the war. . . ."

It was time for the women to go. Oline took Inger aside, led her out into the larder where she knew all the cheeses were stored, and closed the door. "What is it?" asked Inger.

Oline whispered: "Os-Anders, he doesn't dare come here any more. I've told him."

"Ho!" said Inger.

"I told him if he only dared, after what he'd done to you."

"Ay," said Inger. "But he's been here many a time since for all that. And he can come if he likes, I'm not afraid."

"No, that's so," said Oline. "But I know what I know, and if you like, I'll lay a charge against him."

"Ho!" said Inger. "No, you've no call to do that. 'Tis not worth it."

But she was not ill pleased to have Oline on her side; it cost her a cheese, to be sure, but Oline thanked her so fulsomely: "'Tis as I say, 'tis as I've always said: Inger, she gives with both hands; nothing grudging, nothing sparing about her! No, maybe you're not afraid of Os-Anders, but I've forbid him to come here all the same. 'Twas the least I could do for you."

Said Inger then: "What harm could it do if he did come, anyway? He can't hurt me any more."

Oline pricked up her ears: "Ho, you've learned a way yourself, maybe?"

"I shan't have any more children," said Inger.

And now they were quits, each holding as good a trump as the other: for Oline stood there knowing all the time that Os-Anders the Lapp had died the day before. . . .

Why should Inger say that about having no more children? She was not on bad terms with her hus-

band, 'twas no cat-and-dog life between them — far from it. They had each their own little ways, but it was rarely they quarrelled, and never for long at a time; it was soon made up. And many a time Inger would suddenly be just as she had been in the old days, working hard in the cowshed or in the field; as if she had had a relapse into health again. And at such times Isak would look at his wife with grateful eyes; if he had been the sort of man to speak his mind at once, he might have said, "H'm. What does this mean, heh?" or something of the sort, just to show he appreciated it. But he waited too long, and his praise came too late. So Inger, no doubt, found it not worth while, and did not care to keep it up.

She might have had children till past fifty; as it was, she was perhaps hardly forty now. She had learned all sorts of things at the institution — had she also learned to play tricks with herself? She had come back so thoroughly trained and educated after her long association with the other murderesses; maybe the men had taught her something too — the gaolers, the doctors. She told Isak one day what one young medical man had said of her little crime: "Why should it be a criminal offence to kill children — ay, even healthy children? They were nothing but lumps of flesh after all."

Isak asked: "Wasn't he terribly cruel himself, then?"

"Him!" exclaimed Inger, and told how kind he had been to her herself; it was he who had got an-

other doctor to operate on her mouth and make a human being of her. Now there was only a scar to be seen.

Only a scar, yes. And a fine woman she was in her way, tall and not over-stout, dark, with rich hair; in summer she went barefooted mostly, and with her skirt kilted high; Inger was not afraid of letting her calves be seen. Isak saw them — as who did not!

They did not quarrel, no. Isak had no talent for quarrelling, and his wife had grown readier-witted to answer back. A thorough good quarrel took a long time to grow with Isak, heavy stub of a man as he was; he found himself all entangled in her words, and could say next to nothing himself; and besides, he was fond of her — powerfully in love was Isak. And it was not often he had any need to answer. Inger did not complain; he was an excellent husband in many ways, and she let him alone. What had she to complain of at all? Isak was not a man to be despised; she might have married a worse. Worn out, was he? True, he showed signs of being tired now at times, but nothing serious. He was full of old health and unwasted strength, like herself, and in this autumn of their married life he fulfilled his part at least as affectionately as she did.

But nothing particularly beautiful nor grand about him? No. And here came her superiority. Inger might well think to herself at times how she had seen finer men; handsome gentlemen with walking-

sticks and handkerchiefs and starched collars to wear — oh, those gentlemen of the town! And so she kept Isak in his place, treated him, as it were, no better than he deserved. He was only a peasant, a clodhopper of the wilds; if her mouth had been as it was now from the start she would never have taken him; be sure of that. No, she could have done better than that! The home he had given her, the life he offered her, were poor enough; she might at least have married some one from her own village, and lived among neighbours, with a circle of friends, instead of here like an outcast in the wilds. It was not the place for her now; she had learned to look differently at life.

Strange, how one could come to look differently at things! Inger found no pleasure now in admiring a new calf; she did not clap her hands in surprise when Isak came down from the hills with a big basket of fish; no, she had lived for six years among greater things. And of late she had even ceased to be heavenly and sweet when she called him in to dinner. "Your food's ready, aren't you coming in?" was all she said now. And it didn't sound nice. Isak wondered a little at first; it was a curious way to speak; a nasty, uncaring, take-it-or-leave-it way to speak. And he answered: "Why, I didn't know 'twas ready." But when Inger pointed out that he ought to have known, or might have guessed it, anyway, by the sun, he said no more, and let the matter drop.

Ah, but once he got a hold on her and used it — that was when she tried to steal his money from him. Not that Isak was a miser in that way, but the money was clearly his. Ho, it was nearly being ruin and disaster for her that time! But even then it was not exactly thoroughgoing, out-and-out wickedness on Inger's part; she wanted the money for Eleseus — for her blessed boy Eleseus in town, who was asking for his *Daler* again. Was he to go there among all the fine folk and with empty pockets? After all, she had a mother's heart. She asked his father for the money first, and, finding it was no good, had taken it herself. Whether Isak had had some suspicion beforehand, or had found it out by accident — anyhow, it was found out. And suddenly Inger found herself gripped by both arms, felt herself lifted from the floor, and thumped down on to the floor again. It was something strange and terrible — a sort of avalanche. Isak's hands were not weak, not worn out now. Inger gave a groan, her head fell back, she shivered, and gave up the money.

Even then Isak said little, though Inger made no attempt to hinder him from speaking. What he did say was uttered, as it were, in one hard breath: "Huttch! You — you're not fit to have in the place!"

She hardly knew him again. Oh, but it must have been long-stored bitterness that would not be repressed.

A miserable day, and a long night, and a day beyond. Isak went out of the house and lay out-

side, for all that there was hay to be got in; Sivert was with his father. Inger had little Leopoldine and the animals to keep her company; but lonely she was for all that, crying nearly all the time and shaking her head at herself. Only once in all her life before had she felt so moved, and this day called it to mind; it was when she had lain in her bed and throttled a newborn child.

Where were Isak and his son? They had not been idle; no, they had stolen a day and a night or thereabouts from the hay-making, and had built a boat up on the lake. Oh, a rough and poor-looking vessel enough, but strong and sound as their work had always been; they had a boat now, and could go fishing with nets.

When they came home the hay was dry as ever. They had cheated providence by trusting it, and suffered no loss; they had gained by it. And then Sivert flung out an arm, and said: "Ho! Mother's been haymaking!" Isak looked down over the fields and said "H'm." Isak had noticed already that some of the hay had been shifted; Inger ought to be home now for her midday meal. It was well done indeed of her to get in the hay, after he had scolded her the day before and said "Huttch!" And it was no light hay to move; she must have worked hard, and all the cows and goats to milk besides. . . . "Go in and get something to eat," he said to Sivert.

"Aren't you coming, then?"

"No."

A little while after, Inger came out and stood humbly on the door-slab and said:

"If you'd think of yourself a little — and come in and have a bite to eat."

Isak grumbled at that and said "H'm." But it was so strange a thing of late for Inger to be humble in any way, that his stubbornness was shaken.

"If you could manage to set a couple of teeth in my rake, I could get on again with the hay," said she. Ay, she came to her husband, the master of the place, to ask for something, and was grateful that he did not turn scornfully away.

"You've worked enough," said he, "raking and carting and all."

"No, 'tis not enough."

"I've no time, anyway, to mend rakes now. You can see there's rain coming soon."

And Isak went off to his work.

It was all meant to save her, no doubt; for the couple of minutes it would have taken to mend the rake would have been more than tenfold repaid by letting Inger work on. Anyhow, Inger came out with her rake as it was, and fell to haymaking with a will; Sivert came up with the horse and haycart, and all went at it, sweating at the work, and the hay was got in. It was a good stroke of work, and Isak fell to thinking once more of the powers above that guide all our ways — from stealing a *Daler* to getting a crop of hay. Moreover, there lay the boat; after half a generation of thinking it over, the boat was finished; it was there, up on the lake.

"Eyah, *Herregud!*" said Isak.

Chapter XV

IT was a strange evening altogether: a turning-point. Inger had been running off the line for a long time now; and one lift up from the floor had set her in her place again. Neither spoke of what had happened. Isak had felt ashamed of himself after — all for the sake of a *Daler,* a trifle of money, that he would have had to give her after all, because he himself would gladly have let the boy have it. And then again — was not the money as much Inger's as his own? There came a time when Isak found it his turn to be humble.

There came many sorts of times. Inger must have changed her mind again, it seemed; once more she was different, gradually forgetting her fine ways and turning earnest anew: a settler's wife, earnest and thoughtful as she had been before. To think that a man's hard grip could work such wonders! But it was right; here was a strong and healthy woman, sensible enough, but spoiled and warped by long confinement in an artificial air — and she had butted into a man who stood firmly on his feet. Never for a moment had he left his natural place on the earth, on the soil. Nothing could move him.

Many sorts of times. Next year came the drought again, killing the growth off slowly, and

wearing down human courage. The corn stood there and shrivelled up; the potatoes — the wonderful potatoes — they did not shrivel up, but flowered and flowered. The meadows turned grey, but the potatoes flowered. The powers above guided all things, no doubt, but the meadows were turning grey.

Then one day came Geissler — ex-Lensmand Geissler came again at last. It was good to find that he was not dead, but had turned up again. And what had he come for now?

Geissler had no grand surprises with him this time, by the look of it; no purchases of mining rights and documents and such-like. Geissler was poorly dressed, his hair and beard turned greyer, and his eyes redder at the edges than before. He had no man, either, to carry his things, but had his papers in a pocket, and not even a bag.

"*Goddag,*" said Geissler.

"*Goddag,*" answered Isak and Inger. "Here's the like of visitors to see this way!"

Geissler nodded.

"And thanks for all you did that time — in Trondhjem," said Inger all by herself.

And Isak nodded at that, and said: "Ay, 'tis two of us owe you thanks for that."

But Geissler — it was not his way to be all feelings and sentiments; he said: "Yes, I'm just going across to Sweden."

For all their trouble of mind over the drought, Sellanraa's folk were glad to see Geissler again;

they gave him the best they had, and were heartily glad to do what they could for him after all he had done.

Geissler himself had no troubles that could be seen; he grew talkative at once, looked out over the fields and nodded. He carried himself upright as ever, and looked as if he had several hundreds of *Daler* in his pockets. It livened them up and brightened everything to have him there; not that he made any boisterous fun, but a lively talker, that he was.

"Fine place, Sellanraa, splendid place," he said. "And now there's others coming up one after another, since you've started, Isak. I counted five myself. Are there any more?"

"Seven in all. There's two that can't be seen from the road."

"Seven holdings; say fifty souls. Why, it'll be a densely populated neighbourhood before long. And you've a school already, so I hear?"

"Ay, we have."

"There — what did I say? A school all to yourselves, down by Brede's place, being more in the middle. Fancy Brede as a farmer in the wilds!" and Geissler laughed at the thought. "Ay, I've heard all about you, Isak; you're the best man here. And I'm glad of it. Sawmill, too, you've got?"

"Ay, such as it is. But it serves me well enough. And I've sawed a bit now and again for them down below."

"Bravo! That's the way!"

"I'd be glad to hear what you think of it, Lensmand, if so be you'd care to look at that sawmill for yourself."

Geissler nodded, with the air of an expert; yes, he would look at it, examine it thoroughly. Then he asked: "You had two boys, hadn't you — what's become of the other? In town? Clerk in an office? H'm," said Geissler. "But this one here looks a sturdy sort — what was your name, now?"

"Sivert."

"And the other one?"

"Eleseus."

"And he's in an engineer's office — what's he reckon to learn there? A starvation business. Much better have come to me," said Geissler.

"Ay," said Isak, for politeness' sake. He felt a sort of pity for Geissler at the moment. Oh, that good man did not look as if he could afford to keep clerks; had to work hard enough by himself, belike. That jacket — it was worn to fringes at the wrists.

"Won't you have some dry hose to put on?" said Inger, and brought out a pair of her own. They were from her best days; fine and thin, with a border.

"No, thanks," said Geissler shortly, though he must have been wet through.—"Much better have come to me," he said again, speaking of Eleseus. "I want him badly." He took a small silver tobacco box from his pocket and sat playing with it

in his fingers. It was perhaps the only thing of value left him now.

But Geissler was restless, changing from one thing to another. He slipped the thing back into his pocket again and started a new theme. "But — what's that? Why, the meadow that's all grey. I thought it was the shadow. The ground is simply parched. Come along with me, Sivert."

He rose from the table suddenly, thinking no more of food, turned in the doorway to say "Thank you" to Inger for the meal, and disappeared, Sivert following.

They went across to the river, Geissler peering keenly about all the time. "Here!" he cried, and stopped. And then he explained: "Where's the sense of letting your land dry up to nothing when you've a river there big enough to drown it in a minute? We'll have that meadow green by to-morrow!"

Sivert, all astonishment, said "Yes."

"Dig down obliquely from here, see? — on a slope. The ground's level; have to make some sort of a channel. You've a sawmill there — I suppose you can find some long planks from somewhere? Good! Run and fetch a pick and spade, and start here; I'll go back and mark out a proper line."

He ran up to the house again, his boots squelching, for they were wet through. He set Isak to work making pipes, a whole lot of them, to be laid down where the ground could not well be cut with ditches.

Isak tried to object that the water might not get so far; the dry ground would soak it up before it reached the parched fields. Geissler explained that it would take some time; the earth must drink a little first, but then gradually the water would go on — "field and meadow green by this time tomorrow."

"Ho!" said Isak, and fell to boxing up long planks as hard as he could.

Off hurries Geissler to Sivert once more: "That's right — keep at it — didn't I say he was a sturdy sort? Follow these stakes, you understand, where I've marked out. If you come up against heavy boulders, or rock, then turn aside and go round, but keep the level — the same depth; you see what I mean?"

Then back to Isak again: "That's one finished — good! But we shall want more — half a dozen, perhaps. Keep at it, Isak; you see, we'll have it all green by tomorrow — we've saved your crops!" And Geissler sat down on the ground, slapped his knees with both hands and was delighted, chattered away, thought in flashes of lightning. "Any pitch, any oakum, or anything about the place? That's splendid — got everything. These things'll leak at the edges you see, to begin with, but the wood'll swell after a while, and they'll be as taut as a bottle. Oakum and pitch — fancy you having it too! — What? Built a boat, you say? Where is the boat? Up in the lake? Good! I must have a look at that too."

Oh, Geissler was all promises. Light come,

light go — and he seemed more giving to fussing about than before. He worked at things by fits and starts, but at a furious rate when he did work. There was a certain superiority about him after all. True, he exaggerated a bit — it was impossible, of course, to get all green by this time tomorrow, as he had said, but for all that, Geissler was a sharp fellow, quick to see and take a decision; ay, a strange man was Geissler. And it was he and no other that saved the crops that year at Sellanraa.

"How many have you got done? Not enough. The more wood you can lay, the quicker it'll flow. Make them twenty feet long or twenty-five, if you can. Any planks that length on the place? Good; fetch them along — you'll find it'll pay you at harvest-time!"

Restless again — up and off to Sivert once more. "That's the way, Sivert man; getting on finely. Your father's turning out culverts like a poet, there'll be more than I ever thought. Run across and get some now, and we'll make a start."

All that afternoon was one hurrying spell; Sivert had never seen such a furious piece of work; he was not accustomed to see things done at that pace. They hardly gave themselves time to eat. But the water was flowing already! Here and there they had to dig deeper, a culvert had to be raised or lowered, but it flowed. The three men were at it till late that night, touching up their work, and keenly on the look out for any fault. But when the water began to trickle out over the driest spots, there was

joy and delight at Sellanraa. "I forgot to bring my watch," said Geissler. "What's the time, I wonder? Ay, she'll be green by this time tomorrow!" said he.

Sivert got up in the middle of the night to see how things were going, and found his father out already on the same errand. Oh, but it was a thrilling time — a day of great events!

But next day, Geissler stayed in bed till nearly noon, worn out now that the fit had passed. He did not trouble to go up and look at the boat on the lake; and but for what he had said the day before, he would never have bothered to look at the sawmill. Even the irrigation works interested him less than at first — and when he saw that neither field nor meadow had turned green in the course of the night, he lost heart, never thinking of how the water flowed, and flowed all the time, and spread out farther and farther over the ground. He backed down a little, and said now: "It may take time — you won't see any change perhaps before tomorrow again. But it'll be all right, never fear."

Later in the day Brede Olsen came lounging in; he had brought some samples of rock he wanted Geissler to see. "And something out of the common, this time, to my mind," said Brede.

Geissler would not look at the things. "That the way you manage a farm," he asked scornfully, "pottering about up in the hills looking for a fortune?"

Brede apparently did not fancy being taken to task

now by his former chief; he answered sharply, without any form of respect, treating the ex-Lensmand as an equal: "If you think I care what you say . . ."

"You've no more sense than you had before," said Geissler. "Fooling away your time."

"What about yourself?" said Brede. "What about you, I'd like to know? You've got a mine of your own up here, and what have you done with it? Huh! Lies there doing nothing. Ay, you're the sort to have a mine, aren't you? He he!"

"Get out of this," said Geissler. And Brede did not stay long, but shouldered his load of samples and went down to his own *menage,* without saying goodbye.

Geissler sat down and began to look over some papers with a thoughtful air. He seemed to have caught a touch of the fever himself, and wanted now to look over that business of the copper mine, the contract, the analyses. It was fine ore, almost pure copper; he must do something with it, and not let everything slide.

"What I really came up for was to get the whole thing settled," he said to Isak. "I've been thinking of making a start here, and that very soon. Get a lot of men to work, and run the thing properly. What do you think?"

Isak felt sorry for the man, and would not say anything against it.

"It's a matter that concerns you as well, you know. There'll be a lot of bother, of course; a lot of men about the place, and a bit rowdy at times,

perhaps. And blasting up in the hills — I don't know how you'll like that. On the other hand, there'll be more life in the district where we begin, and you'll have a good market close at hand for farm produce and that sort of thing. Fix your own price, too."

"Ay," said Isak.

"Besides your share in the mine — you'll get a high percentage of earnings, you know. Big money, Isak."

Said Isak: "You've paid me fairly already, and more than enough. . . ."

Next morning Geissler left, hurrying off eastward, over toward Sweden. "No, thanks," he said shortly, when Isak offered to go with him. It was almost painful to see him start off in that poor fashion, on foot and all alone. Inger had put up a fine parcel of food for him to take, all as nice as she could make it, and made some wafers specially to put in. Even that was not enough; she would have given him a can of cream and a whole lot of eggs, but he wouldn't carry them, and Inger was disappointed.

Geissler himself must have found it hard to leave Sellanraa without paying as he generally did for his keep; so he pretended that he had paid; made as if he had laid down a big note in payment, and said to little Leopoldine: "Here, child, here's something for you as well." And with that he gave her the silver box, his tobacco box. "You can rinse it out and use it to keep pins and things in," he said. "It's

not the sort of thing for a present really. If I were at home I could have found her something else; I've a heap of things. . . ."

But Geissler's waterwork remained after Geissler had gone; there it was, working wonders day and night, week after week; the fields turned green, the potatoes ceased to flower, the corn shot up. . . .

The settlers from the holdings farther down began to come up, all anxious to see the marvel for themselves. Axel Ström,— the neighbour from Maaneland, the man who had no wife, and no woman to help him, but managed for himself,— he came too. He was in a good humour that day; he told them how he had just got a promise of a girl to help through the summer — and that was a weight off his mind. He did not say who the girl was, and Isak did not ask, but it was Brede's girl Barbro who was to come. It would cost the price of a telegram to Bergen to fetch her; but Axel paid the money, though he was not one of your extravagant sort, but rather something of a miser.

It was the waterwork business that had enticed him up today; he had looked it over from one end to the other, and was highly interested. There was no big river on his land, but he had a bit of a stream; he had no planks, either, to make culverts with, but he would dig his channels in the earth; it could be done. Up to now, things were not absolutely at their worst on his land, which lay lower down the slopes; but if the drought continued, he, too, would have to irrigate. When he had seen what he

wanted, he took his leave and went back at once. No, he would not come in, hadn't the time; he was going to start ditching that same evening. And off he went.

This was something different from Brede's way.

Oh, Brede, he could run about the moorland farms now telling news: miraculous waterworks at Sellanraa! "It doesn't pay to work your soil overmuch," he had said. "Look at Isak up there; he's dug and dug about so long that at last he's had to water the whole ground."

Isak was patient, but he wished many a time that he could get rid of the fellow, hanging about Sellanraa with his boastful ways. Brede put it all down to the telegraph; as long as he was a public official, it was his duty to keep the line in order. But the telegraph company had already had occasion several times to reprimand him for neglect, and had again offered the post to Isak. No, it was not the telegraph that was in Brede's mind all the time, but the ore up in the hills; it was his one idea now, a mania.

He took to dropping in often now at Sellanraa, confident that he had found the treasure; he would nod his head and say: "I can't tell you all about it yet, but I don't mind saying I've struck something remarkable this time." Wasting hours and energy all for nothing. And when he came back in the evening to his little house, he would fling down a little sack of samples on the floor, and puff and blow after his day's work, as if no man could have toiled

harder for his daily bread. He grew a few potatoes on sour, peaty soil, and cut the tufts of grass that grew by themselves on the ground about the house — that was Brede's farming. He was never made for a farmer, and there could be but one end to it all. His turf roof was falling to pieces already, and the steps to the kitchen were rotten with damp; a grindstone lay on the ground, and the cart was still left uncovered in the open.

Brede was fortunate perhaps in that such little matters never troubled him. When the children rolled his grindstone about for play, he was kind and indulgent, and would even help them to roll it himself. An easy-going, idle nature, never serious, but also never down-hearted, a weak, irresponsible character; but he managed to find food, such as it was, and kept himself and his alive from day to day; managed to keep them somehow. But it was not to be expected that the storekeeper could go on feeding Brede and his family for ever; he had said so more than once to Brede himself, and he said it now in earnest. Brede admitted he was right, and promised to turn over a new leaf — he would sell his place, and very likely make a good thing out of it — and pay what he owed at the store!

Oh, but Brede would sell out anyhow, even at a loss; what was the good of a farm for him? He was home-sick for the village again, the easy gossiping life there, and the little shop — it suited him better than settling down here to work, and trying to forget the world outside. Could he ever forget

the Christmas trees and parties, or the national feastings on Constitution Day, or the bazaars held in the meeting-rooms? He loved to talk with his kind, to exchange news and views, but who was there to talk with here? Inger up at Sellanraa had seemed to be one of his sort for a while, but then she had changed — there was no getting a word out of her now. And besides, she had been in prison; and for a man in his position — no, it would never do.

No, he had made a mistake in ever leaving the village; it was throwing himself away. He noted with envy that the Lensmand had got another assistant, and the doctor another man to drive for him; he had run away from the people who needed him, and now that he was no longer there, they managed without him. But the men who had taken his place — they were no earthly good, of course. Properly speaking, he, Brede, ought to be fetched back to the village in triumph!

Then there was Barbro — why had he backed up the idea of getting her to go as help to Sellanraa? Well, that was after talking over things with his wife. If all went well, it might mean a good future for the girl, perhaps a future of a sort for all of them. All very well to be housekeeper for two young clerks in Bergen, but who could say what she would get out of that in the long run? Barbro was a pretty girl, and liked to look well; there might be a better chance for her here, after all. For there were two sons at Sellanraa.

But when Brede saw that this plan would never come to anything, he hit on another. After all, there was no great catch in marrying into Inger's lot — Inger who had been in prison. And there were other lads to be thought of besides those two Sellanraa boys — there was Axel Ström, for instance. He had a farm and a hut of his own, he was a man who scraped and saved and little by little managed to get hold of a bit of live stock and such-like, but with no wife, and no woman to help him. "Well, I don't mind telling you, if you take Barbro, she'll be all the help you'll need," said Brede to him. "Look, here's her picture; you can see."

And after a week or so, came Barbro. Axel was in the midst of his haymaking, and had to do his mowing by day and haymaking by night, and all by himself — and then came Barbro! It was a godsend. Barbro soon showed she was not afraid of work; she washed clothes and cleaned things, cooked and milked and helped in the hayfield — helped to carry in the hay, she did. Axel determined to give her good wages, and not lose by it.

She was not merely a photograph of a fine lady here. Barbro was straight and thin, spoke somewhat hoarsely, showed sense and experience in various ways — she was not a child. Axel wondered what made her so thin and haggard in the face. "I'd know you by your looks," he said; "but you're not like the photograph."

"That's only the journey," she said, "and living in town air all that time."

And indeed, she very soon grew plump and well-looking again. "Take my word for it," said Barbro, "it pulls you down a bit, a journey like that, and living in town like that." She hinted also at the temptations of life in Bergen — one had to be careful there. But while they sat talking, she begged him to take in a paper — a Bergen newspaper — so that she could read a bit and see the news of the world. She had got accustomed to reading, and theatres and music, and it was so dull in a place like this.

Axel was pleased with the results of his summer help, and took in a paper. He also bore with the frequent visits of the Brede family, who were constantly dropping in at his place and eating and drinking. He was anxious to show that he appreciated this servant-girl of his. And what could be nicer and homelier than when Barbro sat there of a Sunday evening twanging the strings of a guitar and singing a little with her hoarse voice? Axel was touched by it all, by the pretty, strange songs, by the mere fact that some one really sat there singing on his poor half-baked farm.

True, in the course of the summer he learned to know other sides of Barbro's character, but on the whole, he was content. She had her fancies, and could answer hastily at times; was somewhat overquick to answer back. That Saturday evening, for instance, when Axel himself had to go down to the

village to get some things, it was wrong of Barbro to run away from the hut and the animals and leave the place to itself. They had a few words over that. And where had she been? Only to her home, to Breidablik, but still . . . When Axel came back to the hut that night, Barbro was not there; he looked to the animals, got himself something to eat, and turned in. Towards morning Barbro came. "I only wanted to see what it was like to step on a wooden floor again," she said, somewhat scornfully. And Axel could find nothing much to say to that, seeing that he had as yet but a turf hut with a floor of beaten earth. He did say, however, that if it came to that, he could get a few planks himself, and no doubt but he'd have a house with a wooden floor himself in time! Barbro seemed penitent at that; she was not altogether unkindly. And for all it was Sunday, she went off at once to the woods and gathered fresh juniper twigs to spread on the earthen floor.

And then, seeing she was so fine-hearted and behaved so splendidly, what could Axel do but bring out the kerchief he had bought for her the evening before, though he had really thought of keeping it by a while, and getting something respectable out of her in return. And there! she was pleased with it, and tried it on at once — ay, she turned to him and asked if she didn't look nice in it. And yes, indeed she did; and she might put on his old fur cap if she liked, and she'd look nice in that! Barbro laughed at this and tried to say something really nice

in return; she said: "I'd far rather go to church and communion in this kerchief than wear a hat. In Bergen, of course, we always wore hats — all except common servant-girls from the country."

Friends again, as nice as could be.

And when Axel brought out the newspaper he had fetched from the post office, Barbro sat down to read news of the world: of a burglary at a jeweller's shop in one Bergen street, and a quarrel between two gipsies in another; of a horrible find in the harbour — the dead body of a newborn child sewed up in an old shirt with the sleeves cut off. "I wonder who can have done it?" said Barbro. And she read the list of marketing prices too, as she always did.

So the summer passed.

Chapter XVI

GREAT changes at Sellanraa.

There was no knowing the place again, after what it had been at first: sawmill, cornmill, buildings of all sorts and kinds — the wilderness was peopled country now. And there was more to come. But Inger was perhaps the strangest of all; so altered she was, and good and clever again.

The great event of last year, when things had come to a head, was hardly enough in itself, perhaps, to change her careless ways; there was backsliding now and then, as when she found herself beginning to talk of the "Institute" again, and the cathedral at Trondhjem. Oh, innocent things enough; and she took off her ring, and let down that bold skirt of hers some inches. She was grown thoughtful, there was more quiet about the place, and visits were less frequent; the girls and women from the village came but rarely now, for Inger no longer cared to see them. No one can live in the depth of the wilds and have time for such foolishness. Happiness and nonsense are two different things.

In the wilds, each season has its wonders, but always, unchangingly, there is that immense heavy sound of heaven and earth, the sense of being sur-

rounded on all sides, the darkness of the forest, the kindliness of the trees. All is heavy and soft, no thought is impossible there. North of Sellanraa there was a little tarn, a mere puddle, no bigger than an aquarium. There lived some tiny baby fish that never grew bigger, lived and died there and were no use at all — *Herregud!* no use on earth. One evening Inger stood there listening for the cowbells; all was dead about her, she heard nothing, and then came a song from the tarn. A little, little song, hardly there at all, almost lost. It was the tiny fishes' song.

They had this good fortune at Sellanraa, that every spring and autumn they could see the grey geese sailing in fleets above that wilderness, and hear their chatter up in the air — delirious talk it was. And as if the world stood still for a moment, till the train of them had passed. And the human souls beneath, did they not feel a weakness gliding through them now? They went to their work again, but drawing breath first; something had spoken to them, something from beyond.

Great marvels were about them at all times; in the winter were the stars; in winter often, too, the northern lights, a firmament of wings, a conflagration in the mansions of God. Now and then, not often; not commonly, but now and then, they heard the thunder. It came mostly in the autumn, and a dark and solemn thing it was for man and beast; the animals grazing near home would bunch to-

gether and stand waiting. Bowing their heads — what for? Waiting for the end? And man, what of man standing in the wilds with bowed head, waiting, when the thunder came? Waiting for what?

The spring — ay, with its haste and joy and madcap delight; but the autumn! It called up a fear of darkness, drove one to an evening prayer; there were visions about, and warnings on the air. Folks might go out one day in autumn seeking for something — the man for a piece of timber to his work, the woman after cattle that ran wild now after mushroom growths: they would come home with many secrets in their mind. Did they tread unexpectedly upon an ant, crushing its hind part fast to the path, so the fore part could not free itself again? Or step too near a white grouse nest, putting up a fluttering hissing mother to dash against them? Even the big cow-mushrooms are not altogether meaningless; not a mere white emptiness in the eye. The big mushroom does not flower, it does not move, but there is something overturning in the look of it; it is a monster, a thing like a lung standing there alive and naked — a lung without a body.

Inger grew despondent at last, the wilds oppressed her, she turned religious. How could she help it? No one can help it in the wilds; life there is not all earthly toil and worldliness; there is piety and the fear of death and rich superstition. Inger, maybe, felt that she had more reason than others to fear the judgment of Heaven, and it would not pass her by; she knew how God walked about in the

evening time looking out over all His wilderness with fabulous eyes; ay, He would find her. There was not so much in her daily life wherein she could improve; true, she might bury her gold ring deep in the bottom of a clothes chest, and she could write to Eleseus and tell him to be converted too; after that, there was nothing more she could find beyond doing her work well and not sparing herself. Ay, one thing more; she could dress in humble things, only fastening a blue ribbon at her neck of Sundays. False, unnecessary poverty — but it was the expression of a kind of philosophy, self-humiliation, stoicism. The blue ribbon was not new; it had been cut from a cap little Leopoldine had grown out of; it was faded here and there, and, to tell the truth, a little dirty — Inger wore it now as a piece of modest finery on holy days. Ay, it may be that she went beyond reason, feigning to be poor, striving falsely to imitate the wretched who live in hovels; but even so — would her desert have been greater if that sorry finery had been her best? Leave her in peace; she has a right to peace!

She overdid things finely, and worked harder than she ought. There were two men on the place, but Inger took the chance when both were away at once, and set to work herself sawing wood; and where was the good of torturing and mortifying the flesh that way? She was so insignificant a creature, so little worth, her powers of so common a sort; her death or life would not be noticed in the land, in the State, only here in the wilds. Here, she was almost

great — at any rate, the greatest; and she may well have thought herself worth all the chastening she ordered and endured. Her husband said:

"Sivert and I, we've been talking about this; we're not going to have you sawing wood, and wearing yourself out."

"I do it for conscience' sake," she answered.

Conscience! The word made Isak thoughtful once more. He was getting on in years, slow to think, but weighty when he did come to anything. Conscience must be something pretty strong if it could turn Inger all upside down like that. And however it might be, Inger's conversion made a change in him also; he caught it from her, grew tame, and given to pondering. Life was all heavy-like and stern that winter; he sought for loneliness, for a hiding-place. To save his own trees he had bought up a piece of the State forest near by, with some good timber, over toward the Swedish side, and he did the felling now alone, refusing all help. Sivert was ordered to stay at home and see that his mother did not work too much.

And so, in those short winter days, Isak went out to his work in the dark, and came home in the dark; it was not always there was a moon, or any stars, and at times his own track of the morning would be covered with snow by nightfall, so he was hard put to it to find his way. And one evening something happened.

He was nearing home; in the fine moonlight he could see Sellanraa there on the hillside, neat and

clear of the forest, but small, undergroundish to look at, by reason of the snow banked high against the walls. He had more timber now, and it was to be a grand surprise for Inger and the children when they heard what use he would make of it — the wonderful building he had in mind. He sat down in the snow to rest a bit, not to seem worn out when he came home.

All is quiet around him, and God's blessing on this quiet and thoughtfulness, for it is nothing but good! Isak is a man at work on a clearing in the forest, and he looks out over the ground, reckoning what is to be cleared next turn; heaving aside great stones in his mind — Isak had a real talent for that work. There, he knows now, is a deep, bare patch on his ground; it is full of ore; there is always a metallic film over every puddle of water there — and now he will dig it out. He marks out squares with his eye, making his plans for all, speculating over all; they are to be made green and fruitful. Oh, but a piece of tilled soil was a great and good thing; it was like right and order to his mind, and a delight beyond . . .

He got up, and felt suddenly confused. H'm. What had happened now? Nothing, only that he had been sitting down a bit. Now there is something standing there before him, a Being, a spirit; grey silk — no, it was nothing. He felt strange — took one short, uncertain step forward, and walked straight into a look, a great look, a pair of eyes. At the same moment the aspens close by began rustling. Now any one knows that an aspen

can have a horrible eerie way of rustling at times; anyhow, Isak had never before heard such an utterly horrible rustling as this, and he shuddered. Also he put out one hand in front of him, and it was perhaps the most helpless movement that hand had ever made.

But what was this thing before him? Was it ghost-work or reality? Isak would all his days have been ready to swear that this was a higher power, and once indeed he had seen it, but the thing he saw now did not look like God. Possibly the Holy Ghost? If so, what was it standing there for anyway, in the midst of nowhere; two eyes, a look, and nothing more? If it had come to him, to fetch away his soul, why, so it would have to be; it would happen one day, after all, and then he would go to heaven and be among the blest.

Isak was eager to see what would come next; he was shivering still; a coldness seemed to radiate from the figure before him — it must be the Evil One! And here Isak was no longer sure of his ground, so to speak. It might be the Evil One — but what did he want here? What had he, Isak, been doing? Nothing but sitting still and tilling the ground, as it were, in his thoughts — there could surely be no harm in that? There was no other guilt he could call to mind just then; he was only coming back from his work in the forest, a tired and hungry woodman, going home to Sellanraa — he means no harm. . . .

He took a step forward again, but it was only a

little one, and, to tell the truth, he stepped back again immediately. The vision would not give way. Isak knitted his brows, as if beginning to suspect something. If it were the Evil One, why, let it be; the Evil One was not all-powerful — there was Luther, for instance, who had nearly killed the fiend himself, not to speak of many who had put him to flight by the sign of the cross and Jesu name. Not that Isak meant to defy the peril before him; it was not in his mind to sit down and laugh in its face, but he certainly gave up his first idea of dying and the next world. He took two steps forward straight at the vision, crossed himself, and cried out: "In Jesu name!"

H'm. At the sound of his own voice he came, as it were, to himself again, and saw Sellanraa over on the hillside once more. The two eyes in the air had gone.

He lost no time in getting home, and took no steps to challenge the spectre further. But when he found himself once more safely on his own door-slab, he cleared his throat with a sense of power and security; he walked into the house with lofty mien, like a man — ay, a man of the world.

Inger started at the sight of him, and asked what made him so pale.

And at that he did not deny having met the Evil One himself.

"Where?" she asked.

"Over there. Right up towards our place."

Inger evinced no jealousy on her part. She did

not praise him for it, true, but there was nothing in her manner suggestive of a hard word or a contemptuous kick. Inger herself, you see, had grown somewhat lighter of heart and kindlier of late, whatever the cause; and now she merely asked:

"The Evil One himself?"

Isak nodded: as far as he could see it was himself and no other.

"And how did you get rid of him?"

"I went for him in Jesu name," said Isak.

Inger wagged her head, altogether overwhelmed, and it was some time before she could get his supper on the table.

"Anyhow," said she at last, "we'll have no more of you going out alone in the woods by yourself."

She was anxious about him — and it did him good to know it. He made out to be as bold as ever, and altogether careless whether he went alone or in company; but this was only to quiet Inger's mind, not to frighten her more than necessary with the awful thing that had happened to himself. It was his place to protect her and them all; he was the Man, the Leader.

But Inger saw through it also, and said: "Oh, I know you don't want to frighten me. But you must take Sivert with you all the same."

Isak only sniffed.

"You might be taken poorly of a sudden, taken ill out in the woods — you've not been over well lately."

Isak sniffed again. Ill? Tired, perhaps, and

worn out a bit, but ill? No need for Inger to start worrying and making a fool of him; he was sound and well enough; ate, slept, and worked; his health was simply terrific, it was incurable! Once, felling a tree, the thing had come down on top of him, and broken his ear; but he made light of it. He set the ear in place again, and kept it there by wearing his cap drawn over it night and day, and it grew together again that way. For internal complaints, he dosed himself with *treak* boiled in milk to make him sweat — liquorice it was, bought at the store, an old and tried remedy, the *Teriak* of the ancients. If he chanced to cut his hand, he treated the wound with an ever-present fluid containing salts, and it healed up in a few days. No doctor was ever sent for to Sellanraa.

No, Isak was not ill. A meeting with the Evil One might happen even to the healthiest man. And he felt none the worse for his adventure afterwards; on the contrary, it seemed to have strengthened him. And as the winter drew on, and it was not such a dreadful time to wait till the spring, he, the Man and the Leader, began to feel himself almost a hero: he understood these things; only trust to him and all would be well. In case of need, he could exorcise the Evil One himself!

Altogether, the days were longer and lighter now; Easter was past, Isak had hauled up all his timber, everything looked bright, human beings could breathe again after another winter gone.

Inger was again the first to brighten up; she had

been more cheerful now for a long time. What could it be? Ho, 'twas for a very simple reason; Inger was heavy again; expecting a child again. Everything worked out easily in her life, no hitch anywhere. But what a mercy, after the way she had sinned! it was more than she had any right to expect. Ay, she was fortunate, fortunate. Isak himself actually noticed something one day, and asked her straight out: "Looks to me as if you're on the way again; what do you say yourself?"

"Ay, Lord be thanked, 'tis surely so," she answered.

They were both equally astonished. Not that Inger was past the age, of course; to Isak's mind, she was not too old in any way. But still, another child . . . well, well. . . . And little Leopoldine going to school several times a year down at Breidablik — that left them with no little ones about the place now — besides which, Leopoldine herself was grown up now.

Some days passed, and Isak resolutely threw away a whole week-end — from Saturday evening till Monday morning — on a trip down to the village. He would not say what he was going for when he set out, but on his return, he brought with him a girl. "This is Jensine," he said. "Come to help."

"'Tis all your nonsense," said Inger. "I've no need of help at all."

Isak answered that she did need a help — just now.

Need or not — it was a kind and generous thought of his; Inger was abashed and grateful. The new girl was a daughter of the blacksmith, and she was to stay with them for the present; through the summer, anyhow, and then they would see.

"And I've sent a telegram," said Isak, "after him Eleseus."

This fairly startled Inger; startled the mother. A telegram? Did he mean to upset her completely with his thoughtfulness? It had been her great sorrow of late that boy Eleseus was away in town — in the evil-minded town; she had written to him about God, and likewise explained to him how his father here was beginning to sink under the work, and the place getting bigger all the time; little Sivert couldn't manage it all by himself, and besides, he was to have money after his uncle one day — all this she had written, and sent him the money for his journey once for all. But Eleseus was a man-about-town now, and had no sort of longing for a peasant's life; he answered something about what was he to do anyway if he did come home? Work on a farm and throw away all the knowledge and learning he had gained? "In point of fact,"— that was how he put it,—"I've no desire to come back now. And if you could send me some stuff for underclothes, it would save me getting the things on credit." So he wrote. And yes, his mother sent him stuff — sent him remarkable quantities of stuff from time to time for underclothes. But when she was converted, and got religion, the

scales fell from her eyes, and she understood that Eleseus was selling the stuff and spending the money on other things.

His father saw it too. He never spoke of it; he knew that Eleseus was his mother's darling, and how she cried over him and shook her head; but one piece of finely woven stuff went after another the same way, and he knew it was more than any living man could use for underclothes. Altogether, it came to this: Isak must be Man and Leader again — head of the house, and step in and interfere. It had cost a terrible lot of money, to be sure, getting the storekeeper to send a telegram; but in the first place, a telegram could not fail to make an impression on the boy, and also — it was something unusually fine for Isak himself to come home and tell Inger. He carried the servant-girl's box on his back as he strode home; but for all that, he was proud and full of weighty secrets as he had been the day he came home with that gold ring. . . .

It was a grand time after that. For a long while, Inger could not do enough in the way of showing her husband how good and useful she could be. She would say to him now, as in the old days: "You're working yourself to death!" Or again: "'Tis more than any man can stand." Or again: "Now, you're not to work any more; come in and have dinner — I've made some wafers for you!" And to please him, she said: "I should just like to know, now, what you've got in your mind with all that wood, and what you're going to build, now, next?"

"Why, I can't say as yet," said Isak, making a mystery of it.

Ay, just as in the old days. And after the child was born — and it was a little girl — a great big girl, fine-looking and sturdy and sound — after that, Isak must have been a stone and a miserable creature if he had not thanked God. But what was he going to build? It would be more news for Oline to go gadding about with — a new building again at Sellanraa. A new wing of the house — a new house it was to be. And there were so many now at Sellanraa — they had a servant-girl; and Eleseus, he was coming home; and a brand-new little girl-child of their own, just come — the old house would be just an extra room now, nothing more.

And, of course, he had to tell Inger about it one day; she was so curious to know, and though maybe Inger knew it all beforehand, from Sivert,— they two were often whispering together,— she was all surprised as any one could be, and let her arms fall, and said: "'Tis all your nonsense — you don't mean it?"

And Isak, brimming over with greatness inside, he answered her: "Why, with you bringing I don't know how many more children on the place, 'tis the least I can do, it seems."

The two menfolk were out now every day getting stone for the walls of the new house. They worked their utmost together each in his own way: the one young, and with his young body firmly set, quick to see his way, to mark out the stones that would suit;

the other ageing — tough, with long arms, and a mighty weight to bear down on a crowbar. When they had managed some specially difficult feat, they would hold a breathing-space, and talk together in a curious, reserved fashion of their own.

"Brede, he talks of selling out," said the father.

"Ay," said the son. "Wonder what he'll be asking for the place?"

"Ay, I wonder."

"You've not heard anything?"

"No."

"I've heard two hundred."

The father thought for a while, and said: "What d'you think, 'll this be a good stone?"

"All depends if we can get this shell off him," said Sivert, and was on his feet in a moment, giving the setting-hammer to his father, and taking the sledge himself. He grew red and hot, stood up to his full height and let the sledge-hammer fall; rose again and let it fall; twenty strokes alike — twenty thunder-strokes. He spared neither tool nor strength; it was heavy work; his shirt rucked up from his trousers at the waist, leaving him bare in front; he lifted on his toes each time to give the sledge a better swing. Twenty strokes.

"Now! Let's look!" cried his father.

The son stops, and asks: "Marked him any?"

And they lay down together to look at the stone; look at the beast, the devil of a thing; no, not marked any as yet.

"I've a mind to try with the sledge alone," said

the father, and stood up. Still harder work this, sheer force alone, the hammer grew hot, the steel crushed, the pen grew blunt.

"She'll be slipping the head," he said, and stopped. "And I'm no hand at this any more," he said.

Oh, but he never meant it; it was not his thought, that he was no hand at the work any more!

This father, this barge of a man, simple, full of patience and goodness, he would let his son strike the last few blows and cleave the stone. And there it lay, split in two.

"Ay, you've the trick of it," said the father. "H'm, yes . . . Breidablik . . . might make something out of that place."

"Ay, should think so," said the son.

"Only the land was fairly ditched and turned."

"The house'd have to be done up."

"Ay, that of course. Place all done up — 'twould mean a lot of work at first, but . . . What I was going to say, d'you know if your mother was going to church come Sunday?"

"Ay, she said something like it."

"Ho! . . . H'm. Keep your eyes open now and look out for a good big door-slab for the new house. You haven't seen a bit would do?"

"No," said Sivert.

And they fell to work again.

A couple of days later both agreed they had enough stone now for the walls. It was Friday

evening; they sat taking a breathing-space, and talking together the while.

"H'm — what d'you say?" said the father. "Should we think it over, maybe, about Breidablik?"

"How d'you mean?" asked the son. "What to do with it?"

"Why, I don't know. There's the school there, and it's midway down this tract now."

"And what then?" asked the son. "I don't know what we'd do with it, though; it's not worth much as it is."

"That's what you've been thinking of?"

"No, not that way. . . . Unless Eleseus he'd like to have the place to work on."

"Eleseus? Well, no, I don't know ——"

Long pause, the two men thinking hard. The father begins gathering tools together, packing up to go home.

"Ay, unless . . ." said Sivert. "You might ask him what he says."

The father made an end of the matter thus: "Well, there's another day, and we haven't found that door-slab yet, either."

Next day was Saturday, and they had to be off early to get across the hills with the child. Jensine, the servant-girl, was to go with them; that was one godmother, the rest they would have to find from among Inger's folk on the other side.

Inger looked nice; she had made herself a dainty

cotton dress, with white at the neck and wrists. The child was all in white, with a new blue silk ribbon drawn through the lower edge of its dress; but then she was a wonder of a child, to be sure, that could smile and chatter already, and lay and listened when the clock struck on the wall. Her father had chosen her name. It was his right; he was determined to have his say — only trust to him! He had hesitated between Jacobine and Rebecca, as being both sort of related to Isak; and at last he went to Inger and asked timidly: "What d'you think, now, of Rebecca?"

"Why, yes," said Inger.

And when Isak heard that, he grew suddenly independent and master in his own house. "If she's to have a name at all," he said sharply, "it shall be Rebecca! I'll see to that."

And of course he was going with the party to church, partly to carry, and partly for propriety's sake. It would never do to let Rebecca go to be christened without a decent following! Isak trimmed his beard and put on a red shirt, as in his younger days; it was in the worst of the hot weather, but he had a nice new winter suit, that looked well on him, and he wore it. But for all that, Isak was not the man to make a duty of finery and show; as now, for instance, he put on a pair of fabulously heavy boots for the march.

Sivert and Leopoldine stayed behind to look after the place.

Then they rowed in a boat across the lake, and

that was a deal easier than before, when they had had to walk round all the way. But half-way across, as Inger unfastened her dress to nurse the child, Isak noticed something bright hung in a string round her neck; whatever it might be. And in the church he noticed that she wore that gold ring on her finger. Oh, Inger — it had been too much for her after all!

Chapter XVII

ELESEUS came home.

He had been away now for some years, and had grown taller than his father, with long white hands and a little dark growth on his upper lip. He did not give himself airs, but seemed anxious to appear natural and kindly; his mother was surprised and pleased. He shared the small bedroom with Sivert; the two brothers got on well together, and were constantly playing tricks on each other by way of amusement. But, naturally, Eleseus had to take his share of the work in building the house; and tired and miserable it made him, all unused as he was to bodily fatigue of any kind. It was worse still when Sivert had to go off and leave it all to the other two; Eleseus then was almost more of a hindrance than a help.

And where had Sivert gone off to? Why, 'twas Oline had come over the hills one day with word from Uncle Sivert that he was dying; and, of course, young Sivert had to go. A nice state of things all at once — it couldn't have happened worse than to have Sivert running off just now. But there was no help for it.

Said Oline: "I'd no time to go running errands, and that's the truth; but for all that . . . I've taken a fancy to the children here, all of them, and

little Sivert, and if as I could help him to his legacy . . ."

"But was Uncle Sivert very bad, then?"

"Bad? Heaven bless us, he's falling away day by day."

"Was he in bed, then?"

"In bed? How can you talk so light and flighty of death before God's Judgment-seat? Nay, he'll neither hop nor run again in this world, will your Uncle Sivert."

All this seemed to mean that Uncle Sivert had not long to live, and Inger insisted that little Sivert should set off at once.

But Uncle Sivert, incorrigible old knave, was not on his death-bed; was not even confined to bed at all. When young Sivert came, he found the little place in terrible muddle and disorder; they had not finished the spring season's work properly yet — had not even carted out all the winter manure; but as for approaching death, there was no sign of it that he could see. Uncle Sivert was an old man now, over seventy; he was something of an invalid, and pottered about half-dressed in the house, and often kept his bed for a time. He needed help on the place in many ways, as, for instance, with the herring nets that hung rotting in the sheds. Oh, but for all that he was by no means at his last gasp; he could still eat sour fish and smoke his pipe.

When Sivert had been there half an hour and seen how things were, he was for going back home again.

"Home?" said the old man.

"We're building a house, and father's none to help him properly."

"Ho!" said his uncle. "Isn't Eleseus come home, then?"

"Ay, but he's not used to the work."

"Then why did you come at all?"

Sivert told him about Oline and her message, how she had said that Uncle Sivert was on the point of death.

"Point of death?" cried the old man. "Said I was on the point of death, did she? A cursed old fool!"

"Ha ha ha!" said Sivert.

The old man looked sternly at him. "Eh? Laugh at a dying man, do you, and you called after me and all!"

But Sivert was too young to put on a graveyard face for that; he had never cared much for his uncle. And now he wanted to get back home again.

"Ho, so you thought so, too?" said the old man again. "Thought I was at my last gasp, and that fetched you, did it?"

"'Twas Oline said so," answered Sivert.

His uncle was silent for a while, then spoke again:

"Look you here. If you'll mend that net of mine and put it right, I'll show you something."

"H'm," said Sivert. "What is it?"

"Well, never you mind," said the old man sullenly, and went to bed again.

It was going to be a long business, evidently. Sivert writhed uncomfortably. He went out and took a look round the place; everything was shame-

fully neglected and uncared for; it was hopeless to begin work here. When he came in after a while, his uncle was sitting up, warming himself at the stove.

"See that?" He pointed to an oak chest on the floor at his feet. It was his money chest. As a matter of fact, it was a lined case made to hold bottles, such as visiting justices and other great folk used to carry with them when travelling about the country in the old days, but there were no bottles in it now; the old man had used it for his documents and papers as district treasurer; he kept his accounts and his money in it now. The story ran that it was full of uncounted riches; the village folk would shake their heads and say: "Ah! if I'd only as much as lies in old Sivert his chest!"

Uncle Sivert took out a paper from the box and said solemnly: "You can read writing, I suppose?"

Little Sivert was not by any means a great hand at that, it is true, but he made out so much as told him he was to inherit all that his uncle might leave at his death.

"There," said the old man. "And now you can do as you please." And he laid the paper back in the chest.

Sivert was not greatly impressed; after all, the paper told him no more than he had known before; ever since he was a child he had heard say that he was to have what Uncle Sivert left one day. A sight of the treasure would be another matter.

"There's some fine things in that chest, I doubt," said he.

"There's more than you think," said the old man shortly.

He was angry and disappointed with his nephew; he locked up the box and went to bed again. There he lay, delivering jets of information. "I've been district treasurer and warden of the public moneys in this village over thirty year; *I've* no need to beg and pray for a helping hand from any man! Who told Oline, I'd like to know, that I was on my death-bed? I can send three men, carriage and cart to fetch a doctor if I want one. Don't try your games with me, young man! Can't even wait till I'm gone, it seems. I've shown you the document and you've seen it, and it's there in the chest — that's all I've got to say. But if you go running off and leave me now, you can just carry word to Eleseus and tell *him* to come. He's not named after me and called by my earthly name — let *him* come."

But for all the threatening tone, Sivert only thought a moment, and said: "Ay, I'll tell Eleseus to come."

Oline was still at Sellanraa when Sivert got back. She had found time to pay a visit lower down, to Axel Ström and Barbro on their place, and came back full of mysteries and whisperings. "That girl Barbro's filling out a deal of late — Lord knows what it may mean. But not a word that I've said so! And here's Sivert back again? No need to ask what news, I suppose? Your Uncle Sivert's passed away? Ay, well, an old man he was and an aged one, on the brink of the grave. What — not

dead? Well, well, we've much to be thankful for, and that's a solemn word! Me talking nonsense, you say? Oh, if I'd never more to answer for! How was I to know your uncle he was lying there a sham and a false pretender before the Lord? Not long to live, that's what I said. And I'll hold by it, when the time comes, before the Throne. What's that you say? Well, and wasn't he lying there his very self in his bed, and folding his hands on his breast and saying 'twould soon be over?"

There was no arguing with Oline, she bewildered her adversaries with talk and cast them down. When she learned that Uncle Sivert had sent for Eleseus, she grasped at that too, and made her own advantage of it: "There you are, and see if I was talking nonsense. Here's old Sivert calling up his kinsfolk and longing for a sight of his own flesh and blood; ay, he's nearing his end! You can't refuse him, Eleseus; off with you at once this minute and see your uncle while there's life in him. I'm going that way too, we'll go together."

Oline did not leave Sellanraa without taking Inger aside for more whisperings of Barbro. "Not a word I've said — but I could see the signs of it! And now I suppose she'll be wife and all on the farm there. Ay, there's some folk are born to great things, for all they may be small as the sands of the sea in their beginnings. And who'd have ever thought it of that girl Barbro! Axel, yes, never doubt but he's a toiling sort and getting on, and great fine lands and means and all like you've got

here —'tis more than we know of over on our side the hills, as you know's a true word, Inger, being born and come of the place yourself. Barbro, she'd a trifle of wool in a chest; 'twas naught but winter wool, and I wasn't asking and she never offered me. We said but *Goddag* and *Farvel,* for all that I'd known her from she was a toddling child all that time I was here at Sellanraa by reason of you being away and learning knowledge at the Institute . . ."

"There's Rebecca crying," said Inger, breaking in on Oline. But she gave her a handful of wool.

Then a great thanksgiving speech from Oline: ay, wasn't it just as she had said to Barbro herself of Inger, and how there was not her like to be found for giving to folk; ay, she'd give till she was bare, and give her fingers to the bone, and never complain. Ay, go in and see to the sweet angel, and never was there a child in the world so like her mother as Rebecca — no. Did Inger remember how she'd said one day as she'd never have children again? Ah, now she could see! No, better give ear to them as were grown old and had borne children of their own, for who should fathom the Lord His ways, said Oline.

And with that she padded off after Eleseus up through the forest, shrunken with age, grey and abject, and for ever nosing after things, imperishable. Going to old Sivert now, to let him know how she, Oline, had managed to persuade Eleseus to come.

But Eleseus had needed no persuading, there was

no difficulty there. For, look you, Eleseus had turned out better, after all, than he'd begun; a decent lad in his way, kindly and easy-going from a child, only nothing great in the way of bodily strength. It was not without reason he had been unwilling to come home this time; he knew well enough that his mother had been in prison for child-murder; he had never heard a word about it there in the town, but at home in the village every one would remember. And it was not for nothing he had been living with companions of another sort. He had grown to be more sensitive and finer feeling than ever before. He knew that a fork was really just as necessary as a knife. As a man of business, he used the terms of the new coinage, whereas, out in the wilds, men still counted money by the ancient *Daler*. Ay, he was not unwilling to walk across the hills to other parts; here, at home, he was constantly forced to keep down his own superiority. He tried his best to adapt himself to the others, and he managed well; but it was always having to be on his guard. As, for instance, when he had first come back to Sellanraa a couple of weeks ago, he had brought with him his light spring overcoat, though it was midsummer; and when he hung it up on a nail, he might just as well have turned it so as to show the silver plate inside with his initials, but he didn't. And the same with his stick — his walking-stick. True, it was only an umbrella stick really, that he had dismantled and taken the framework off; but here he had not used it as he did in town, swing-

ing it about — only carried it hidden against his thigh.

No, it was not surprising that Eleseus went across the hills. He was no good at building houses; he was good at writing with letters, a thing not every one could do, but here at home there was no one in all the place that set any store by the art of it save perhaps his mother. He set off gaily through the woods, far ahead of Oline; he could wait for her farther up. He ran like a calf; he hurried. Eleseus had in a way stolen off from the farm; he was afraid of being seen. For, to tell the truth, he had taken with him both spring coat and walking-stick for the journey. Over on the other side there might be a chance of seeing people, and being seen himself; he might even be able to go to church. And so he sweated happily under the weight of an unnecessary spring coat in the heat of the sun.

They did not miss him at the building, far from it. Isak had Sivert back again, and Sivert was worth a host of his brother at that work; he could keep at it from morning to night. It did not take them long to get the framework up; it was only three walls, as they were building out from the other. And they had less trouble with the timber; they could cut their planks at the sawmill, which gave them the outside pieces for roofing at the same time. And one fine day there was the house all finished, before their eyes, roofed, floored, and with the windows in. They had no time for more than

this between the seasons; the boarding and painting would have to wait.

And now came Geissler with a great following across the hills from Sweden. And the men with him rode on horseback with glossy-coated horses and yellow saddles; rich travellers they must be no doubt; stout, heavy men; the horses bowed under their weight. And among all these great personages came Geissler on foot. Four gentlemen and Geissler made up the party, and then there were a couple of servants, each leading a packhorse.

The riders dismounted outside the farm, and Geissler said: "Here's Isak — here's the Margrave of the place himself. *Goddag,* Isak! I've come back again, you see, as I said I would."

Geissler was the same as ever. For all that he came on foot, his manner showed no consciousness of inferiority to the rest; ay, his threadbare coat hung long and wretched-looking down over his shrunken back, but he put on a grand enough air for all that. He even said: "We're going up into the hills a bit, these gentlemen and myself — it'll do them good to get their weight down a bit."

The gentlemen themselves were nice and pleasant enough; they smiled at Geissler's words, and hoped Isak would excuse their coming rioting over his land like this. They had brought their own provisions, and did not propose to eat him out of house and home, but they would be glad of a roof over their

heads for the night. Perhaps he could put them up in the new building there?

When they had rested a while, and Geissler had been inside with Inger and the children, the whole party went up into the hills and stayed out till evening. Now and again in the course of the afternoon, the folks at Sellanraa could hear an unusually heavy report from the distance, and the train of them came down with new bags of samples. "Blue copper," they said, nodding at the ore. They talked long and learnedly, and consulting a sort of map they had drawn; there was an engineer among them, and a mining expert; one appeared to be a big landowner or manager of works. They talked of aerial railways and cable traction. Geissler threw in a word here and there, and each time as if advising them; they paid great attention to what he said.

"Who owns the land south of the lake?" one of them asked Isak.

"The State," answered Geissler quickly. He was wide awake and sharp, and held in his hand the document Isak had once signed with his mark. "I told you before — the State," he said. "No need to ask again. If you don't believe me, you can find out for yourself if you please."

Later in the evening, Geissler took Isak aside and said: "Look here, shall we sell that copper mine?"

Said Isak: "Why, as to that, 'twas so that Lensmand bought it of me once, and paid for it."

"True," said Geissler. "I bought the ground. But then there was a provision that you were to

have a percentage of receipts from working or sale; are you willing to dispose of your share?"

This was more than Isak could understand, and Geissler had to explain. Isak could not work a mine, being a farmer and a clearer of forest land; Geissler himself couldn't run a mine either. Money, capital? Ho, as much as he wanted, never fear! But he hadn't the time, too many things to do, always running about the country, attending to his property in the south, his property in the north. And now Geissler was thinking of selling out to these Swedish gentlemen here; they were relatives of his wife, all of them, and rich men. "Do you see what I mean?"

"I'll do it what way you please," said Isak.

A strange thing — this complete confidence seemed to comfort Geissler wonderfully in his threadbareness. "Well, I'm not sure it's the best thing you could do," he said thoughtfully. Then suddenly he was certain, and went on: "But if you'll give me a free hand to act on my discretion, I can do better for you at any rate than you could by yourself."

"H'm," began Isak. "You've always been a good man to us all here. . . ."

But Geissler frowned at that, and cut him short: "All right, then."

Next morning the gentlemen sat down to write. It was a serious business; there was first of all a contract for forty thousand *Kroner* for the sale of the mine, then a document whereby Geissler made

over the whole of the money to his wife and children. Isak and Sivert were called in to witness the signatures to these. When it was done, the gentlemen wanted to buy over Isak's percentage for a ridiculous sum — five hundred *Kroner*. Geissler put a stop to that, however. "Jesting apart," he said.

Isak himself understood but little of the whole affair; he had sold the place once, and got his money. But in any case, he did not care much about *Kroner* — it was not real money like *Daler*. Sivert, on the other hand, followed the business with more understanding. There was something peculiar, he thought, about the tone of these negotiations; it looked very much like a family affair between the parties. One of the strangers would say: "My dear Geissler, you ought not to have such red eyes, you know." Whereto Geissler answered sharply, if evasively: "No, I ought not, I know. But we don't all get what we ought to in this world!"

It looked very much as if Fru Geissler's brothers and kinsmen were trying to buy off her husband, secure themselves against his visits for the future, and get quit of a troublesome relation. As to the mine, it was worth something in itself, no doubt, no one denied it; but it lay far out of the way, and the buyers themselves said they were only taking it over in order to sell it again to some one better in a position to work it. There was nothing unreasonable in that. They declared too, quite frankly, that they had no idea what they would be able to get for

it as it stood; if it were taken up and worked, then the forty thousand might turn out to be only a fraction of what it was worth; if it were allowed to lie there as it was, the money was simply thrown away. But in any case, they wanted to have a clear title, without encumbrance, and therefore they offered Isak five hundred *Kroner* for his share.

" I'm acting on his behalf," said Geissler, " and I'm not going to sell out his share for less than ten per cent. of the purchase-money."

" Four thousand! " said the others.

" Four thousand," said Geissler. " The land was his, and his share comes to four thousand. It wasn't mine, and I get forty thousand. Kindly turn that over in your minds, if you please."

" Yes, but — four thousand *Kroner!* "

Geissler rose from his place, and said: " That, or no sale."

They thought it over, whispered about it, went out into the yard, talking as long as they could. " Get the horses ready," they called to the servants. One of the gentlemen went in to Inger and paid royally for coffee, a few eggs, and their lodging. Geissler walked about with a careless air, but he was wide awake all the same.

" How did that irrigation work turn out last year? " he asked Sivert.

" It saved the whole crop."

" You've cut away that mound there since I was here last, what? "

" Ay."

"You must have another horse on the farm," said Geissler. He noticed everything.

One of the strangers came up. "Now then, let's get this matter settled and have done with it," he said.

They all went into the new building again, and Isak's four thousand *Kroner* were counted out. Geissler was given a paper, which he thrust into his pocket as if it were of no value at all. "Keep that carefully," they told him, "and in a few days your wife shall have the bankbook sent."

Geissler puckered his forehead and said shortly: "Very good."

But they were not finished with Geissler yet. Not that he opened his mouth to ask for anything; he simply stood there, and they saw how he stood there: maybe he had stipulated beforehand for a trifle on his own account. The leader gave him a bundle of notes, and Geissler simply nodded again, and said: "Very good."

"And now I think we ought to drink a glass with Geissler," said the other.

They drank, and that was done. And then they took leave of Geissler.

Just at that moment came Brede Olsen walking up. Now what did he want? Brede had doubtless heard the reports of the blasting charges the day before, and understood that there was something on foot in the way of mines. And now he came up ready to sell something too. He walked straight past Geissler, and addressed himself to the gentle-

men; he had found some remarkable specimens of rock hereabouts, quite extraordinary, some blood-like, others like silver; he knew every cranny and corner in the hills around and could go straight to every spot; he knew of long veins of some heavy metal — whatever it might be.

"Have you any samples?" asked the mining expert.

Yes, Brede had samples. But couldn't they just as well go up and look at the places at once? It wasn't far. Samples — oh, sacks of them, whole packing-cases full. No, he had not brought them with him, they were at home — he could run down and fetch them. But it would be quicker just to run up into the hills and fetch some more, if they would only wait.

The men shook their heads and went on their way.

Brede looked after them with an injured air. If he had felt a glimmer of hope for the moment, it was gone now; fate was against him, nothing ever went right. Well for Brede that he was not easily cast down; he looked after the men as they rode away, and said at last: "Wish you a pleasant journew!" And that was all.

But now he was humble again in his manner towards Geissler, his former chief, and no longer treated him as an equal, but used forms of respect. Geissler had taken out his pocket-book on some pretext or other, and any one could see that it was stuffed full of notes.

"If only Lensmand could help me a bit," said Brede.

"Go back home and work your land properly," said Geissler, and helped him not a bit.

"I might easily have brought up a whole barrow-load of samples, but wouldn't it have been easier to go up and look at the place itself while they were here?"

Geissler took no notice of him, and turned to Isak: "Did you see what I did with that document? It was a most important thing — a matter of several thousand *Kroner*. Oh, here it is, in among a bundle of notes."

"Who were those people?" asked Brede. "Just out for a ride, or what?"

Geissler had been having an anxious time, no doubt, and now he cooled down. But he had still something of life and eagerness in him, enough to do a little more; he went up into the hills with Sivert, and took a big sheet of paper with him, and drew a map of the ground south of the lake — Heaven knows what he had in mind. When he came down to the farm some hours later, Brede was still there, but Geissler took no notice of his questions; Geissler was tired, and waved him aside.

He slept like a stone till next morning early, then he rose with the sun, and was himself again. "Sellanraa," said he, standing outside and looking all round.

"All that money," said Isak; "does it mean I'm to have it all?"

"All?" said Geissler. "Heavens, man, can't you see it ought to have been ever so much more? And it was my business really to pay you, according to our contract; but you saw how things were — it was the only way to manage it. What did you get? Only a thousand *Daler,* according to the old reckoning. I've been thinking, you'll need another horse on the place now."

"Ay."

"Well, I know of one. That fellow Heyerdahl's assistant, he's letting his place go to rack and ruin; takes more interest in running about selling folk up. He's sold a deal of his stock already, and he'll be willing to sell the horse."

"I'll see him about it," said Isak.

Geissler waved his hand broadly around, and said: "Margrave, landowner — that's you! House and stock and cultivated land — they can't starve you out if they try!"

"No," said Isak. "We've all we could wish for that the Lord ever made."

Geissler went fussing about the place, and suddenly slipped in to Inger. "Could you manage a bit of food for me to take along again?" he asked. "Just a few wafers — no butter and cheese; there's good things enough in them already. No, do as I say; I can't carry more."

Out again. Geissler was restless, he went into the new building and sat down to write. He had thought it all out beforehand, and it did not take long now to get it down. Sending in an application

to the State, he explained loftily to Isak —" to the Ministry of the Interior, you understand. Yes, I've no end of things to look after all at once."

When he had got his parcel of food and had taken leave, he seemed to remember something all of a sudden: " Oh, by the way, I'm afraid I owe you something from last time — I took out a note from my pocket-book on purpose, and then stuck it in my waistcoat pocket — I found it there afterwards. Too many things to think about all at once. . . ." He put something into Inger's hand and off he went.

Ay, off went Geissler, bravely enough to all seeming. Nothing downcast nor anyway nearing his end; he came to Sellanraa again after, and it was long years before he died. Each time he went away the Sellanraa folk missed him as a friend. Isak had been thinking of asking him about Breidablik, getting his advice, but nothing came of it. And maybe Geissler would have dissuaded him there; have thought it a risky thing to buy up land for cultivation and give it to Eleseus; to a clerk.

Chapter XVIII

UNCLE SIVERT died after all. Eleseus spent three weeks looking after him, and then the old man died. Eleseus arranged the funeral, and managed things very well; got hold of a fuchsia or so from the cottages round, and borrowed a flag to hoist at half-mast, and bought some black stuff from the store for lowered blinds. Isak and Inger were sent for, and came to the burial. Eleseus acted as host, and served out refreshments to the guests; ay, and when the body was carried out, and they had sung a hymn, Eleseus actually said a few suitable words over the coffin, and his mother was so proud and touched that she had to use her handkerchief. Everything went off splendidly.

Then on the way home with his father, Eleseus had to carry that spring coat of his openly, though he managed to hide the stick in one of the sleeves. All went well till they had to cross the water in a boat; then his father sat down unexpectedly on the coat, and there was a crack. "What was that?" asked Isak.

"Oh, nothing," said Eleseus.

But he did not throw the broken stick away; as soon as they got home, he set about looking for a bit of tube or something to mend it with. "We'll fix

it all right," said Sivert, the incorrigible. "Look here, get a good stout splint of wood on either side, and lash all fast with waxed thread. . . ."

"I'll lash you with waxed thread," said Eleseus.

"Ha ha ha! Well, perhaps you'd rather tie it up neatly with a red garter?"

"Ha ha ha," said Eleseus himself at that; but he went in to his mother, and got her to give him an old thimble, filed off the end, and made quite a fine ferrule. Oh, Eleseus was not so helpless after all, with his long, white hands.

The brothers teased each other as much as ever. "Am I to have what Uncle Sivert's left?" asked Eleseus.

"You have it? How much is it?" asked Sivert.

"Ha ha ha, you want to know how much it is first, you old miser!"

"Well, you can have it, anyway," said Sivert.

"It's between five and ten thousand."

"*Daler?*" cried Sivert; he couldn't help it.

Now Eleseus never reckoned in *Daler,* but he didn't like to say no at the time, so he just nodded, and left it at that till next day.

Then he took up the matter again. "Aren't you sorry you gave me all that yesterday?" he said.

"Woodenhead! Of course not," said Sivert. That was what he said, but — well, five thousand *Daler* was five thousand *Daler,* and no little sum; if his brother were anything but a lousy Indian savage, he ought to give back half.

"Well, to tell the truth," explained Eleseus, "I

don't reckon to get fat on that legacy, after all."

Sivert looked at him in astonishment. "Ho, don't you?"

"No, nothing special, that is to say. Not what you might call *par excellence*."

Eleseus had some notions of accounts, of course, and Uncle Sivert's money-chest, the famous bottle-case, had been opened and examined while he was there; he had had to go through all the accounts and make up a balance sheet. Uncle Sivert had not set this nephew to work on the fields or mending of herring nets; he had initiated him into a complex muddle of figures, the weirdest book-keeping ever seen. If a man had paid his taxes some years back in kind, with a goat, say, or a load of dried cod, there was neither flesh nor fish to show for it now; but old Sivert searched his memory and said, "He's paid!"

"Right, then we'll cross him out," said Sivert.

Eleseus was the man for this sort of work; he was bright and quick, and encouraged the invalid by assuring him that things were all right; the two had got on well together, even to jesting at times. Eleseus was a bit of a fool, perhaps, in some things, but so was his uncle; and the two of them sat there drawing up elaborate documents in favour not only of little Sivert but also to benefit the village, the commune which the old man had served for thirty years. Oh, they were grand days! "I couldn't have got a better man to help with all this than you, Eleseus boy," said Uncle Sivert. He sent out and

bought mutton, in the middle of the summer; fish was brought up fresh from the sea, Eleseus being ordered to pay cash from the chest. They lived well enough. They got hold of Oline — they couldn't have found a better person to invite to a feast, nor one more sure to spread abroad the news of Uncle Sivert's greatness to the end. And the satisfaction was mutual. "We must do something for Oline, too," said Uncle Sivert, "she being a widow and not well off. There'll be enough for little Sivert, anyhow." Eleseus managed it with a few strokes of the pen; a mere codicil to the last will and testament, and lo, Oline was also a sharer in the inheritance.

"I'll look after you," said Uncle Sivert to her. "If so be I shouldn't get better this time and get about again on earth I'll take care you're not left out." Oline declared that she was speechless, but speechless she was not; she wept and was touched to the heart and grateful; there was none to compare with Oline for finding the immediate connection between a worldly gift and being "repaid a thousandfold eternally in the world to come." No, speechless she was not.

But Eleseus? At first, perhaps, he may have taken a bright enough view of his uncle's affairs, but after a while he began to think things over and talk as well. He tried at first with a slight hint: "The accounts aren't exactly as they should be," he said.

"Well, never mind that," said the old man. "There'll be enough and to spare when I'm gone."

"You've money outstanding besides, maybe?" said Eleseus. "In a bank, or so?" For so report had said.

"H'm," said the old man. "That's as it may be. But, anyhow, with the fishery, the farm and buildings and stock, red cows and white cows and all — don't you worry about that, Eleseus, my boy."

Eleseus had no idea what the fishery business might be worth, but he had seen the live stock; it consisted of one cow, partly red and partly white. Uncle Sivert must have been delirious. Some of the accounts, too, were difficult to make out at all; they were a muddle, a bare jumble of figures, especially from the date when the coinage was changed; the district treasurer had frequently reckoned the small *Kroner* as if they were full *Daler*. No wonder he fancied himself rich! But when everything was reduced to something like order, Eleseus feared there would not be much left over. Perhaps not enough to settle at all.

Ay, Sivert might easily promise him all that came to him from his uncle!

The two brothers jested about it. Sivert was not upset over the matter, not at all; perhaps, indeed, it might have irked him something more if he really had thrown away five thousand *Daler*. He knew well enough that it had been a mere speculation, naming him after his uncle; he had no claim to anything there. And now he pressed Eleseus to take what there was. "It's to be yours, of course," said he. "Come along, let's get it set down in writing.

I'd like to see you a rich man. Don't be too proud to take it!"

Ay, they had many a laugh together. Sivert, indeed, was the one that helped most to keep Eleseus at home; it would have been much harder but for him.

As a matter of fact, Eleseus was getting rather spoiled again; the three weeks' idling on the other side of the hills had not done him any good. He had also been to church there, and made a show; ay, he had even met some girls there. Here at Sellanraa there was nothing of that sort; Jensine, the servant-maid, was a mere nothing, a worker and no more, rather suited to Sivert.

"I've a fancy to see how that girl Barbro from Breidablik turned out now she's grown up," said Eleseus one day.

"Well, go down to Axel Ström's place and see," said Sivert.

Eleseus went down one Sunday. Ay, he had been away, gained confidence and high spirits once more; he had tasted excitement of a sort, and he made things livelier at Axel's little place. Barbro herself was by no means to be despised; at any rate she was the only one anywhere near. She played the guitar and talked readily; moreover, she did not smell of tansy, but of real scent, the sort you buy in shops. Eleseus, on his part, let it be understood that he was only home for a holiday, and would soon be called back to the office again. But it was not so bad being at home after all, in the old place, and, of

course, he had the little bedroom to live in. But it was not like being in town!

"Nay, that's a true word," said Barbro. "Town's very different from this."

Axel himself was altogether out of it with these two town-folk; he found it dull with them, and preferred to go out and look over his land. The pair of them were left to do as they liked, and Eleseus managed things grandly. He told how he had been over to the neighbouring village to bury his uncle, and did not forget to mention the speech he had made over the coffin.

When he took his leave, he asked Barbro to go part of the way home with him. But Barbro, thank you, was not inclined that way.

"Is that the way they do things where you've been," she asked—"for the ladies to escort the gentlemen home?"

That was a nasty hit for Eleseus; he turned red, and understood he had offended her.

Nevertheless, he went down to Maaneland again next Sunday, and this time he took his stick. They talked as before, and Axel was out of it altogether, as before. "'Tis a big place your father's got," said he. "And building again, now, it seems."

"Ay, it's all very well for him," said Eleseus, anxious to show off a little. "He can afford it. It's another matter with poor folk like ourselves."

"How d'you mean?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? There's been some

Swedish millionaires came down the other day and bought a mine of him, a copper mine."

"Why, you don't say? And he'll have got a heap of money for it, then?"

"Enormous. Well, I don't want to boast, but it was at any rate ever so many thousands. What was I going to say? Build? You've a deal of timber lying about here yourself. When are you going to start?"

Barbro put in her word here: "Never!"

Now that was pure exaggeration and impertinence. Axel had got his stones the autumn before, and carted them home that winter; now, between seasons, he had got the foundation walls done, and cellar and all else — all that remained was to build the timbered part above. He was hoping to get part of it roofed in this autumn, and had thought of asking Sivert to lend him a hand for a few days — what did Eleseus think of that?

Eleseus thought like as not. "But why not ask me?" he said, smiling.

"You?" said Axel, and he spoke with sudden respect at the idea. "You've talents for other things than that, I take it."

Oh, but it was pleasant to find oneself appreciated here in the wilds! "Why, I'm afraid my hands aren't much good at that sort of work," said Eleseus delicately.

"Let me look," said Barbro, and took his hand.

Axel dropped out of the conversation again, and went out, leaving the two of them alone. They

were of an age, had been to school together, and played and kissed each other and raced about; and now, with a fine disdainful carelessness, they talked of old times — exchanging reminiscences — and Barbro, perhaps, was inclined to show off a little before her companion. True, this Eleseus was not like the really fine young men in offices, that wore glasses and gold watches and so on, but he could pass for a gentleman here in the wilds, there was no denying that. And she took out her photograph now and showed him — that's what she looked like then —" all different now, of course." And Barbro sighed.

" Why, what's the matter with you now?" he asked.

" Don't you think I've changed for the worse since then?"

" Changed for the worse, indeed! Well, I don't mind telling you you're ever so much prettier now," said he, " filled out all round. For the worse? Ho! That's a fine idea!"

" But it's a nice dress, don't you think? Cut open just a bit front and back. And then I had that silver chain you see there, and it cost a heap of money, too; it was a present from one of the young clerks I was with then. But I lost it. Not exactly lost it, you know, but I wanted money to come home."

Eleseus asked: " Can I have the photo to keep?"

" To keep? H'm. What'll you give me for it?"

Oh, Eleseus knew well enough what he wanted to say, but he dared not. "I'll have mine taken when I go back to town," he said instead, "and send it you."

Barbro put away the photograph. "No, it's the only one I've left."

That was a stroke of darkness to his young heart, and he stretched out his hand towards the picture.

"Well, give me something for it, now," she said, laughing. And at that he up and kissed her properly.

After that it was easier all round; Eleseus brightened up, and got on finely. They flirted and joked and laughed, and were excellent friends. "When you took my hand just now it was like a bit of swan's down — yours, I mean."

"Oh, you'll be going back to town again, and never come back here, I'll be bound," said Barbro.

"Do you think I'm that sort?" said Eleseus.

"Ah, I dare say there's a somebody there you're fond of."

"No, there isn't. Between you and me, I'm not engaged at all," said he.

"Oh yes, you are; I know."

"No, solemn fact, I'm not."

They carried on like this quite a while; Eleseus was plainly in love. "I'll write to you," said he. "May I?"

"Yes," said she.

"For I wouldn't be mean enough if you didn't care about it, you know." And suddenly he was

jealous, and asked: "I've heard say you're promised to Axel here; is it true?"

"Axel?" she said scornfully, and he brightened up again. "I'll see him farther!" But then she turned penitent, and added: "Alex, he's good enough for me, though. . . . And he takes in a paper all for me to read, and gives me things now and again — lots of things. I will say that."

"Oh, of course," Eleseus agreed. "He may be an excellent fellow in his way, but that's not everything. . . ."

But the thought of Axel seemed to have made Barbro anxious; she got up, and said to Eleseus: "You'll have to go now; I must see to the animals."

Next Sunday Eleseus went down a good deal later than usual, and carried the letter himself. It was a letter! A whole week of excitement, all the trouble it had cost him to write, but here it was at last; he had managed to produce a letter: "To Fröken Barbro Bredesen. It is two or three times now I have had the inexpressible delight of seeing you again. . . ."

Coming so late as he did now, Barbro must at any rate have finished seeing to the animals, and might perhaps have gone to bed already. That wouldn't matter — quite the reverse, indeed.

But Barbro was up, sitting in the hut. She looked now as if she had suddenly lost all idea of being nice to him and making love — Eleseus fancied Axel had perhaps got hold of her and warned her.

"Here's the letter I promised you," he said.

"Thank you," said she, and opened it, and read it through without seeming much moved. "I wish I could write as nice a hand as that," she said.

Eleseus was disappointed. What had he done — what was the matter with her? And where was Axel? He was not there. Beginning to get tired of these foolish Sunday visits, perhaps, and preferred to stay away; or he might have had some business to keep him over, when he went down to the village the day before. Anyhow, he was not there.

"What d'you want to sit here in this stuffy old place for on a lovely evening?" asked Eleseus. "Come out for a walk."

"I'm waiting for Axel," she answered.

"Axel? Can't you live without Axel, then?"

"Yes. But he'll want something to eat when he comes back."

Time went, time dribbled away, they came no nearer each other; Barbro was as cross and contrary as ever. He tried telling her again of his visit across the hills, and did not forget about the speech he had made: "'Twasn't much I had to say, but all the same it brought out the tears from some of them."

"Did it?" said she.

"And then one Sunday I went to church."

"What news there?"

"News? Oh, nothing. Only to have a look round. Not much of a priest, as far as I know anything about it; no sort of manner, he had."

Time went.

"What d'you think Axel'd say if he found you here this evening again?" said Barbro suddenly.

There was a thing to say! It was as if she had struck him. Had she forgotten all about last time? Hadn't they agreed that he was to come this evening? Eleseus was deeply hurt, and murmured: "I can go, if you like. What have I done?" he asked then, his lips trembling. He was in distress, in trouble, that was plain to see.

"Done? Oh, you haven't done anything."

"Well, what's the matter with you, anyway, this evening?"

"With me? Ha ha ha! — But come to think of it, 'tis no wonder Axel should be angry."

"I'll go, then," said Eleseus again. But she was still indifferent, not in the least afraid, caring nothing that he sat there struggling with his feelings. Fool of a woman!

And now he began to grow angry; he hinted his displeasure at first delicately: to the effect that she was a nice sort indeed, and a credit to her sex, huh! But when that produced no effect — oh, he would have done better to endure it patiently, and say nothing. But he grew no better for that; he said: "If I'd known you were going to be like this, I'd never have come this evening at all."

"Well, what if you hadn't?" said she. "You'd have lost a chance of airing that cane of yours that you're so fond of."

Oh, Barbro, she had lived in Bergen, she knew

how to jeer at a man; she had seen real walking-sticks, and could ask now what he wanted to go swinging a patched-up umbrella handle like that for. But he let her go on.

"I suppose now you'll be wanting that photograph back you gave me," he said. And if that didn't move her, surely nothing would, for among folks in the wilds, there was nothing counted so mean as to take back a gift.

"That's as it may be," she answered evasively.

"Oh, you shall have it all right," he answered bravely. "I'll send it back at once, never fear. And now perhaps you'll give me back my letter." Eleseus rose to his feet.

Very well; she gave him back the letter. But now the tears came into her eyes as she did so; this servant girl was touched; her friend was forsaking her — good-bye for ever!

"You've no need to go," she said. "I don't care for what Axel says."

But Eleseus had the upper hand now, and must use it; he thanked her and said good-bye. "When a lady carries on that way," he said, "there's nothing else to be done."

He left the house, quietly, and walked up homeward, whistling, swinging his stick, and playing the man. Huh! A little while after came Barbro walking up; she called to him once or twice. Very well; he stopped, so he did, but was a wounded lion. She sat down in the heather looking penitent; she fidgeted with a sprig, and a little after he too soft-

ened, and asked for a kiss, the last time, just to say good-bye, he said. No, she would not. "Be nice and be a dear, like you were last time," he begged, and moved round her on all sides, stepping quickly, if he could see his chance. But she would not be a dear; she got up. And there she stood. And at that he simply nodded and went.

When he was out of sight, Axel appeared suddenly from behind some bushes. Barbro started, all taken aback, and asked: "What's that — where have you been? Up that way?"

"No; I've been down that way," he answered. "But I saw you two going up here."

"Ho, did you? And a lot of good it did you, I dare say," she cried, suddenly furious. She was certainly not easier to deal with now. "What are you poking and sniffing about after, I'd like to know? What's it to do with you?"

Axel was not in the best of temper himself. "H'm. So he's been here again today?"

"Well, what if he has? What do you want with him?"

"I want with him? It's what you want with him, I'd like to ask. You ought to be ashamed."

"Ashamed? Huh! The least said about that, if you ask me," said Barbro. "I'm here to sit in the house like a statue, I suppose? What have I got to be ashamed of, anyway? If you like to go and get some one else to look after the place, I'm ready to go. You hold your tongue, that's all I've got to say, if it's not too much to ask. I'm going back

now to get your supper and make the coffee, and after that I can do as I please."

They came home with the quarrel at its height.

No, they were not always the best of friends, Axel and Barbro; there was trouble now and again. She had been with him now for a couple of years, and they had had words before; mostly when Barbro talked of finding another place. He wanted her to stay there for ever, to settle down there and share the house and life with him; he knew how hard it would be for him if he were left without help again. And she had promised several times — ay, in her more affectionate moments she would not think of going away at all. But the moment they quarrelled about anything, she invariably threatened to go. If for nothing else, she must go to have her teeth seen to in town. Go, go away . . . Axel felt he must find a means to keep her.

Keep her? A lot Barbro cared for his trying to keep her if she didn't want to stay.

"Ho, so you want to go away again?" said he.

"Well, and if I do?"

"*Can* you, d'you think?"

"Well, and why not? If you think I'm afraid because the winter's coming on . . . But I can get a place in Bergen any day I like."

Then said Axel steadily enough: "It'll be some time before you can do that, anyway. As long as you're with child."

"With child? What are you talking about?"

Axel stared. Was the girl mad?

True, he himself should have been more patient. Now that he had the means of keeping her, he had grown too confident, and that was a mistake; there was no need to be sharp with her and make her wild; he need not have ordered her in so many words to help him with the potatoes that spring — he might have planted them by himself. There would be plenty of time for him to assert his authority after they were married; until then he ought to have had sense enough to give way.

But — it *was* too bad, this business with Eleseus, this clerk, who came swaggering about with his walking-stick and all his fine talk. For a girl to carry on like that when she was promised to another man — and in her condition! It was beyond understanding. Up to then, Axel had had no rival to compete with — now, it was different.

"Here's a new paper for you," he said. "And here's a bit of a thing I got you. Don't know if you'll care about it."

Barbro was cold. They were sitting there together, drinking scalding hot coffee from the bowl, but for all that she answered icy cold:

"I suppose that's the gold ring you've been promising me this twelvemonth and more."

This, however, was beyond the mark, for it *was* the ring after all. But a gold ring it was not, and that he had never promised her —'twas an invention of her own; silver it was, with gilt hands clasped, real silver, with the mark on and all. But ah, that unlucky voyage of hers to Bergen! Barbro

had seen real engagement rings — no use telling her!

"That ring! Huh! You can keep it yourself."

"What's wrong with it, then?"

"Wrong with it? There's nothing wrong with it that I know," she answered, and got up to clear the table.

"Why, you'll needs make do with it for now," he said. "Maybe I'll manage another some day."

Barbro made no answer.

A thankless creature was Barbro this evening. A new silver ring — she might at least have thanked him nicely for it. It must be that clerk with the town ways that had turned her head. Axel could not help saying: "I'd like to know what that fellow Eleseus keeps coming here for, anyway. What does he want with you?"

"With me?"

"Ay. Is he such a greenhorn and can't see how 'tis with you now? Hasn't he eyes in his head?"

Barbro turned on him straight at that: "Oh, so you think you've got a hold on me because of *that?* You'll find out you're wrong, that's all."

"Ho!" said Axel.

"Ay, and I'll not stay here, neither."

But Axel only smiled a little at this; not broadly and laughing in her face, no; for he did not mean to cross her. And then he spoke soothingly, as to a child: "Be a good girl now, Barbro. 'Tis you and me, you know."

And of course in the end Barbro gave in and was

good, and even went to sleep with the silver ring on her finger.

It would all come right in time, never fear.

For the two in the hut, yes. But what about Eleseus? 'Twas worse with him; he found it hard to get over the shameful way Barbro had treated him. He knew nothing of hysterics, and took it as all pure cruelty on her part; that girl Barbro from Breidablik thought a deal too much of herself, even though she *had* been in Bergen. . . .

He sent her back the photograph in a way of his own — took it down himself one night and stuck it through the door to her in the hayloft, where she slept. 'Twas not done in any rough unmannerly way, not at all; he had fidgeted with the door a long time so as to wake her, and when she rose up on her elbow and asked, "What's the matter; can't you find your way in this evening?" he understood the question was meant for some one else, and it went through him like a needle; like a sabre.

He walked back home — no walking-stick, no whistling. He did not care about playing the man any longer. A stab at the heart is no light matter.

And was that the last of it?

One Sunday he went down just to look; to peep and spy. With a sickly and unnatural patience he lay in hiding among the bushes, staring over at the hut. And when at last there came a sign of life and movement it was enough to make an end of him altogether: Axel and Barbro came out together and went across to the cowshed. They were loving and affec-

tionate now, ay, they had a blessed hour: they walked with their arms round each other, and he was going to help her with the animals. Ho, yes!

Eleseus watched the pair with a look as if he had lost all; as a ruined man. And his thought, maybe, was like this: There she goes arm in arm with Axel Ström. How she could ever do it I can't think: there was a time when she put her arms round me! And there they disappeared into the shed.

Well, let them! Huh! Was he to lie here in the bushes and forget himself? A nice thing for him — to lie there flat on his belly and forget himself. Who was she, after all? But he was the man he was. Huh! again.

He sprang to his feet and stood up. Brushed the twigs and dust from his clothes and drew himself up and stood upright again. His rage and desperation came out in a curious fashion now: he threw all care to the winds, and began singing a ballad of highly frivolous import. And there was an earnest expression on his face as he took care to sing the worst parts loudest of all.

Chapter XIX

ISAK came back from the village with a horse.

Ay, it had come to that; he had bought the horse from the Lensmand's assistant; the animal was for sale, as Geissler had said, but it cost two hundred and forty *Kroner* — that was sixty *Daler*. The price of horseflesh had gone up beyond all bounds: when Isak was a boy the best horse could be bought for fifty *Daler*.

But why had he never raised a horse himself? He had thought of it, had imagined a nice little foal — that he had been waiting for these two years past. That was a business for folk who could spare the time from their land, could leave waste patches lying waste till they got a horse to carry home the crop. The Lensmand's assistant had said: "I don't care about paying for a horse's keep myself; I've no more hay than my womenfolk can get it in by themselves while I'm away on duty."

The new horse was an old idea of Isak's, he had been thinking of it for years; it was not Geissler who had put him up to it. And he had also made preparations such as he could; a new stall, a new rope for tethering it in the summer; as for carts, he had some already, he must make some more for the autumn. Most important of all was the fodder, and

he had not forgotten that, of course; or why should he have thought it so important to get that last patch broken up last year if it hadn't been to save getting rid of one of the cows, and yet have enough keep for a new horse? It was sown for green fodder now; that was for the calving cows.

Ay, he had thought it all out. Well might Inger be astonished again, and clap her hands just as in the old days.

Isak brought news from the village; Breidablik was to be sold, there was a notice outside the church. The bit of crop, such as it was,— hay and potatoes, — to go with the rest. Perhaps the live stock too; a few beasts only, nothing big.

"Is he going to sell up the home altogether and leave nothing?" cried Inger. "And where's he going to live?"

"In the village."

It was true enough. Brede was going back to the village. But he had first tried to get Axel Ström to let him live there with Barbro. He didn't succeed. Brede would never dream of interfering with the relations between his daughter and Axel, so he was careful not to make himself a nuisance, though to be sure it was a hard set-back, with all the rest. Axel was going to get his new house built that autumn; well, then, when he and Barbro moved in there, why couldn't Brede and his family have a hut? No! 'Twas so with Brede, he didn't look at things like a farmer and a settler on new land; he didn't understand that Axel had to move out be-

cause he wanted the hut for his growing stock; the hut was to be a new cowshed. And even when this was explained to him, he failed to see the point of view; surely human beings should come before animals, he said. No, a settler's way was different; animals first; a man could always find himself a shelter for the winter. But Barbro put in a word herself now: "Ho, so you put the animals first and us after? 'Tis just as well I know it!" So Axel had made enemies of a whole family because he hadn't room to house them. But he would not give way. He was no good-natured fool, was Axel, but on the contrary he had grown more and more careful; he knew well that a crowd like that moving in would give him so many more mouths to fill. Brede bade his daughter be quiet, and tried to make out that he himself would rather move down to the village again; couldn't endure life in the wilderness, he said—'twas only for that reason he was selling the place.

Oh, but to tell the truth it was not so much Brede was selling the place; 'twas the Bank and the storekeeper were selling up Breidablik, though for the sake of appearances they let it be done in Brede's name. That way, he thought he was saved from disgrace. And Brede was not altogether dejected when Isak met him; he consoled himself with the thought that he was still Inspector on the telegraph line; that was a regular income, anyway, and in time he would be able to work up to his old position in the place as the Lensmand's companion and this

and that. He was something affected at the change, of course; 'twas not so easy to say good-bye to a place where one had lived and toiled and moiled so many years, and come to care for. But Brede, good man, was never long cast down. 'Twas his best point, the charm of him. He had once in his life taken it into his head to be a tiller of the soil, 'twas an inspiration had come to him. True, he had not made a success of it, but he had taken up other plans in the same airy way and got on better; and who could say — perhaps his samples of ore might after all turn out something wonderful in time! And then look at Barbro, he had got her fixed up there at Maaneland, and she'd not be leaving Axel Ström now, that he could swear — 'twas plain indeed for any one to see.

No, there was nothing to fear as long as he had his health and could work for himself and those that looked to him, said Brede Olsen. And the children were just growing up, and big enough now to go out and make their own way in the world, said he. Helge was gone to the herring fisheries already, and Katrine was going to help at the doctor's. That left only the two youngest — well, well, there was a third on the way, true, but, anyhow . . .

Isak had more news from the village: the Lensmand's lady had had a baby. Inger suddenly interested at this: "Boy or girl?"

"Why, I didn't hear which," said Isak.

But the Lensmand's lady had had a child after all — after all the way she'd spoken at the women's

club about the increasing birth-rate among the poor; better give women the franchise and let them have some say in their own affairs, she said. And now she was caught. Yes, the parson's wife had said, "She's had some say in lots of things — but her own affairs are none the better for it, ha ha ha!" And that was a clever saying that went the round of the village, and there were many that understood what was meant — Inger no doubt as well; it was only Isak who did not understand.

Isak understood his work, his calling. He was a rich man now, with a big farm, but the heavy cash payments that had come to him by a lucky chance he used but poorly; he put the money aside. The land saved him. If he had lived down in the village, maybe the great world would have affected even him; so much gaiety, so many elegant manners and ways; he would have been buying useless trifles, and wearing a red Sunday shirt on weekdays. Here in the wilds he was sheltered from all immoderation; he lived in clear air, washed himself on Sunday mornings, and took a bath when he went up to the lake. Those thousand *Daler* — well, 'twas a gift from Heaven, to be kept intact. What else should he do? His ordinary outgoings were more than covered by the produce of his fields and stock.

Eleseus, of course, knew better; he had advised his father to put the money in the Bank. Well, perhaps that was the best, but Isak had put off doing it for the present — perhaps it would never be done at all. Not that Isak was above taking advice from

his son; Eleseus was no fool, as he showed later on. Now, in the haymaking season, he had tried his hand with the scythe — but he was no master hand at that, no. He kept close to Sivert, and had to get him to use the whetstone every time. But Eleseus had long arms and could pick up hay in first-rate fashion. And he and Sivert and Leopoldine, and Jensine the servant-maid, they were all busy now in the fields with the first lot of hay that year. Eleseus did not spare himself either, but raked away till his hands were blistered and had to be wrapped in rags. He had lost his appetite for a week or so, but worked none the worse for it now. Something had come over the boy; it looked perhaps as if a certain unhappy love affair or something of the sort, a touch of never-to-be-forgotten sorrow and distress, had done him a world of good. And, look you, he had by now smoked the last of the tobacco he had brought with him from town; ordinarily, that would have been enough to make a clerk go about banging doors and expressing himself emphatically upon many points; but no, Eleseus only grew the steadier for it; firmer and more upright; a man indeed. Even Sivert, the jester, could not put him out of countenance. Today the pair of them were lying out on boulders in the river to drink, and Sivert imprudently offered to get some extra fine moss and dry it for tobacco —" unless you'd rather smoke it raw?" he said.

" I'll give you tobacco," said Eleseus, and reaching out, ducked Sivert head and shoulders in the

water. Ho, one for him! Sivert came back with his hair still dripping.

"Looks like Eleseus he's turning out for the good," thought Isak to himself, watching his son at work. And to Inger he said: "H'm — wonder if Eleseus he'll be staying home now for good?"

And she just as queerly cautious again: "'Tis more than I can say. No, I doubt if he will."

"Ho! Have you said a word of it to himself?"

"No — well, yes, I've talked a bit with him, maybe. But that's the way I think."

"Like to know, now — suppose he'd a bit of land of his own . . ."

"How do you mean?"

"If he'd work on a place of his own?"

"No."

"Well, have you said anything?"

"Said anything? Can't you see for yourself? No, I don't see anything in him Eleseus, that way."

"Don't sit there talking ill of him," said Isak impartially. "All I can see is, he's doing a good day's work down there."

"Ay, maybe," said Inger submissively.

"And I can't see what you've got to find fault with the lad," cried Isak, evidently displeased. "He does his work better and better every day, and what can you ask more?"

Inger murmured: "Ay, but he's not like he used to be. You try talking to him about waistcoats."

"About waistcoats? What d'you mean?"

"How he used to wear white waistcoats

in summer when he was in town, so he says."

Isak pondered this a while; it was beyond him. "Well, can't he have a white waistcoat?" he said. Isak was out of his depth here; of course it was only women's nonsense; to his mind, the boy had a perfect right to a white waistcoat, if it pleased him; anyhow, he couldn't see what there was to make a fuss about, and was inclined to put the matter aside and go on.

"Well, what do you think, if he had Brede's bit of land to work on?"

"Who?" said Inger.

"Him Eleseus."

"Breidablik? Nay, 'tis more than's worth your while."

The fact was, she had already been talking over that very plan with Eleseus, she had heard it from Sivert, who could not keep the secret. And indeed, why should Sivert keep the matter secret when his father had surely told him of it on purpose to feel his way? It was not the first time he had used Sivert as a go-between. Well, but what had Eleseus answered? Just as before, as in his letters from town, that no, he would not throw away all he had learned, and be an insignificant nothing again. That was what he had said. Well, and then his mother had brought out all her good reasons, but Eleseus had said no to them all; he had other plans for his life. Young hearts have their unfathomable depths, and after what had happened, likely enough he did not care about staying on with Barbro as a

neighbour. Who could say? He had put it loftily enough in talking to his mother; he could get a better position in town than the one he had; could go as clerk to one of the higher officials. He must get on, he must rise in the world. In a few years, perhaps, he might be a Lensmand, or perhaps a lighthouse keeper, or get into the Customs. There were so many roads open to a man with learning.

However it might be, his mother came round, was drawn over to his point of view. Oh, she was so little sure of herself yet; the world had not quite lost its hold on her. Last winter she had gone so far as to read occasionally a certain excellent devotional work which she had brought from Trondhjem, from the Institute; but now, Eleseus might be a Lensmand one day!

"And why not?" said Eleseus. "What's Heyerdahl himself but a former clerk in the same department?"

Splendid prospects. His mother herself advised him not to give up his career and throw himself away. What was a man like that to do in the wilds?

But why should Eleseus then trouble to work hard and steadily as he was doing now on his father's land? Heaven knows, he had some reason, maybe. Something of inborn pride in him still, perhaps; he would not be outdone by others; and besides, it would do him no harm to be in his father's good books the day he went away. To tell the truth, he had a number of little debts in town, and it would be a good thing to be able to settle them at once —

improve his credit a lot. And it was not a question now of a mere hundred *Kroner,* but something worth considering.

Eleseus was far from stupid, but on the contrary, a sly fellow in his way. He had seen his father come home, and knew well enough he was sitting there in the window at that moment, looking out. No harm in putting his back into it then for a bit, working a little harder for the moment — it would hurt no one, and might do himself good.

Eleseus was somehow changed; whatever it might be, something in him had been warped, and quietly spoiled; he was not bad, but something blemished. Had he lacked a guiding hand those last few years? What could his mother do to help him now? Only stand by him and agree. She could let herself be dazzled by her son's bright prospects for the future, and stand between him and his father, to take his part — she could do that.

But Isak grew impatient at last over her opposition; to his mind, the idea about Breidablik was by no means a bad one. Only that very day, coming up, he had stopped the horse almost without thinking, to look out with a critical eye over the ill-tended land; ay, it could be made a fine place in proper hands.

"Why not worth while?" he asked Inger now. "I've that much feeling for Eleseus, anyway, that I'd help him to it."

"If you've any feeling for him, then say never a word of Breidablik again," she answered.

"Ho!"

"Ay, for he's greater thoughts in his head than the like of us."

Isak, too, is hardly sure of himself here, and it weakens him; but he is by no means pleased at having shown his hand, and spoken straight out about his plan. He is unwilling to give it up now.

"He shall do as I say," declares Isak suddenly. And he raises his voice threateningly, in case Inger by any chance should be hard of hearing. "Ay, you may look; I'll say no more. It's midway up, with a schoolhouse by, and everything; what's the greater thoughts he's got beyond that, I'd like to know? With a son like that I might starve to death — is that any better, d'you think? And can you tell me why my own flesh and blood should turn and go contrary to — to my own flesh and blood?"

Isak stopped; he realized that the more he talked the worse it would be. He was on the point of changing his clothes, getting out of his best things he had put on to go down to the village in; but no, he altered his mind, he would stay as he was — whatever he meant by that. "You'd better say a word of it to Eleseus," he says then.

And Inger answers: "Best if you'd say it yourself. He won't do as I say."

Very well, then, Isak is head of the house, so he should think; now see if Eleseus dares to murmur! But, whether it were because he feared defeat, Isak draws back now, and says: "Ay, 'tis true, I might say a word of it myself. But by reason of having

so many things to do, and busy with this and that, I've something else to think of."

"Well . . . ?" said Inger in surprise.

And Isak goes off again — not very far, only to the farther fields, but still, he goes off. He is full of mysteries, and must hide himself out of the way. The fact is this: he had brought back a third piece of news from the village today, and that was something more than the rest, something enormous; and he had hidden it at the edge of the wood. There it stands, wrapped up in sacking and paper; he uncovers it, and lo, a huge machine. Look! red and blue, wonderful to see, with a heap of teeth and a heap of knives, with joints and arms and screws and wheels — a mowing-machine. No, Isak would not have gone down today for the new horse if it hadn't been for that machine.

He stands with a marvellously keen expression, going over in his mind from beginning to end the instructions for use that the storekeeper had read out; he sets a spring here, and shifts a bolt there, then he oils every hole and every crevice, then he looks over the whole thing once more. Isak had never known such an hour in his life. To pick up a pen and write one's mark on a paper, a document — ay, 'twas a perilous great thing that, no doubt. Likewise in the matter of a new harrow he had once brought up — there were many curiously twisted parts in that to be considered. Not to speak of the great circular saw that had to be set in its course to the nicety of a pencil line, never swaying east nor west, lest

it should fly asunder. But this — this mowing-machine of his —'twas a crawling nest of steel springs and hooks and apparatus, and hundreds of screws — Inger's sewing-machine was a bookmarker compared with this!

Isak harnessed himself to the shafts and tried the thing. Here was the wonderful moment. And that was why he kept out of sight and was his own horse.

For — what if the machine had been wrongly put together and did not do its work, but went to pieces with a crash! No such calamity happened, however; the machine could cut grass. And so indeed it ought, after Isak had stood there, deep in study, for hours. The sun had gone down. Again he harnesses himself and tries it; ay, the thing cuts grass. And so indeed it ought!

When the dew began to fall close after the heat of the day, and the boys came out, each with his scythe to mow in readiness for next day, Isak came in sight close to the house and said:

"Put away scythes for tonight. Get out the new horse, you can, and bring him down to the edge of the wood."

And on that, instead of going indoors to his supper as the others had done already, he turned where he stood and went back the way he had come.

"D'you want the cart, then?" Sivert called after him.

"No," said his father, and walked on.

Swelling with mystery, full of pride; with a little

lift and throw from the knee at every step, so emphatically did he walk. So a brave man might walk to death and destruction, carrying no weapon in his hand.

The boys came up with the horse, saw the machine, and stopped dead. It was the first mowing-machine in the wilds, the first in the village — red and blue, a thing of splendour to man's eyes. And the father, head of them all, called out, oh, in a careless tone, as if it were nothing uncommon: "Harness up to this machine here."

And they drove it; the father drove. Brrr! said the thing, and felled the grass in swathes. The boys walked behind, nothing in their hands, doing no work, smiling. The father stopped and looked back. H'm, not as clear as it might be. He screws up a nut here and there to bring the knives closer to the ground, and tries again. No, not right yet, all uneven; the frame with the cutters seems to be hopping a little. Father and sons discuss what it can be. Eleseus has found the instructions and is reading them. "Here, it says to sit up on the seat when you drive — then it runs steadier," he says.

"Ho!" says his father. "Ay, 'tis so, I know," he answers. "I've studied it all through." He gets up into the seat and starts off again; it goes steadily now. Suddenly the machine stops working — the knives are not cutting at all. "*Ptro!* What's wrong now?" Father down from his seat, no longer swelling with pride, but bending an anxious, questioning face down over the machine.

Father and sons all stare at it; something must be wrong. Eleseus stands holding the instructions.

"Here's a bolt or something," says Sivert, picking up a thing from the grass.

"Ho, that's all right, then," says his father, as if that was all that was needed to set everything in order. "I was just looking for that bolt." But now they could not find the hole for it to fit in — where in the name of wonder could the hole be, now?

And it was now that Eleseus could begin to feel himself a person of importance; he was the man to make out a printed paper of instructions. What would they do without him? He pointed unnecessarily long to the hole and explained: "According to the illustration, the bolt should fit in there."

"Ay, that's where she goes," said his father. "'Twas there I had it before." And, by way of regaining lost prestige, he ordered Sivert to set about looking for more bolts in the grass. "There ought to be another," he said, looking very important, as if he carried the whole thing in his head. "Can't you find another? Well, well, it'll be in its hole then, all right."

Father starts off again.

"Wait a minute — this is wrong," cried Eleseus. Ho, Eleseus standing there with the drawing in his hand, with the Law in his hand; no getting away from him! "That spring there goes outside," he says to his father.

"Ay, what then?"

"Why, you've got it in under, you've set it wrong.

It's a steel spring, and you have to fix it outside, else the bolt jars out again and stops the knives. You can see in the picture here."

"I've left my spectacles behind, and can't see it quite," says his father, something meekly. "You can see better — you set it as it should go. I don't want to go up to the house for my spectacles now."

All in order now, and Isak gets up. Eleseus calls after him: "You must drive pretty fast, it cuts better that way — it says so here."

Isak drives and drives, and everything goes well, and Brrr! says the machine. There is a broad track of cut grass in his wake, neatly in line, ready to take up. Now they can see him from the house, and all the womenfolk come out; Inger carries little Rebecca on her arm, though little Rebecca has learned to walk by herself long since. But there they come — four womenfolk, big and small — hurrying with straining eyes down towards the miracle, flocking down to see. Oh, but now is Isak's hour. Now he is truly proud, a mighty man, sitting high aloft dressed in holiday clothes, in all his finery; in jacket and hat, though the sweat is pouring off him. He swings round in four big angles, goes over a good bit of ground, swings round, drives, cuts grass, passes along by where the women are standing; they are dumbfounded, it is all beyond them, and Brrr! says the machine.

Then Isak stops and gets down. Longing, no doubt, to hear what these folk on earth down there will say; what they will find to say about it all. He

hears smothered cries; they fear to disturb him, these beings on earth, in his lordly work, but they turn to one another with awed questionings, and he hears what they say. And now, that he may be a kind and fatherly lord and ruler to them all, to encourage them, he says: "There, I'll just do this bit, and you can spread it tomorrow."

"Haven't you time to come in and have a bite of food?" says Inger, all overwhelmed.

"Nay, I've other things to do," he answers.

Then he oils the machine again; gives them to understand that he is occupied with scientific work. Drives off again, cutting more grass. And, at long last, the womenfolk go back home.

Happy Isak — happy folk at Sellanraa!

Very soon the neighbours from below will be coming up. Axel Ström is interested in things, he may be up tomorrow. But Brede from Breidablik, he might be here that very evening. Isak would not be loth to show them his machine, explain it to them, tell them how it works, and all about it. He can point out how that no man with a scythe could ever cut so fine and clean. But it costs money, of course — oh, a red-and-blue machine like that is a terribly costly thing!

Happy Isak!

But as he stops for oil the third time, there! his spectacles fall from his pocket. And, worst of all, the two boys saw it. Was there a higher power behind that little happening — a warning against overweening pride? He had put on those spectacles

time and again that day to study the instructions, without making out a word; Eleseus had to help him with that. Eyah, *Herregud,* 'twas a good thing, no doubt, to be book-learned. And, by way of humbling himself, Isak determines to give up his plan of making Eleseus a tiller of soil in the wilds; he will never say a word of it again.

Not that the boys made any great business about that matter of the spectacles; far from it. Sivert, the jester, had to say something, of course; it was too much for him. He plucked Eleseus by the sleeve and said: "Here, come along, we'll go back home and throw those scythes on the fire. Father's going to do all the mowing now with his machine!" And that was a jest indeed.

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